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By the Same Author

Fiction—

GARETH THE PLOUGHMAN
THE PEAK

Biography—

OUMA SMUTS: THE FIRST LADY OF SOUTH AFRICA

GATE OF GOLD

By

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CHAPTER I

THE Rand winter sky was a cold blue without a single cloud. The mine dumps shone in the sun, pyramids and loaves of dumps, of many shapes and colours: white like clean sand some of them, others yellow as if they still held the ghost of the gold. And some were slaty grey as if they had never known its touch. Here and there a little grass grew or some spindly tree, desperately clinging to life and doomed to lose the battle, for there is no sustenance in the excreta of gold. Most of the dumps were bald. They had risen from molehills into hills in fifty years. Now around them rose the skyscrapers of Johannesburg. The dumps and skyscrapers were the skyline of the city.

It was a day in June 1940.

Hugh Wayne, from a lecture room at the University of the Witwatersrand, was staring at the city and only half-listening to the voice of the English lecturer, a tall, stooping, mousy-haired man, who spluttered rather than enunciated his words.

The day was full of the story of the evacuation of Dunkirk. It had come over the wireless last night and it was there this morning. Down in the city the people, white and black, were crowding the doorways of the radio shops, listening with their hearts.

All the gold of the Rand, Hugh was thinking, could not now pay the ransom of so many little countries conquered and crushed. France was falling, and its fall would shake the world. England was in danger.

He had been to England twice on visits and he knew that deep in their hearts, although they had been born on the Rand, England remained the spiritual home of his people. He had never thought of England as home . . . until now. It had nurtured his people through the centuries, his folk were of English clay and had carried with them into a new world the rugged power of the Cornwall hills.

He shifted and took his eyes from the dumps. The lecturer was talking about English poetry. Would English poetry now go down in the wars of the ages? Would the light of the world go out? He looked over the class, brooding. Many faces which had been there a few months ago were missing. Many youths had thrown over their studies and had joined up. Some girls had also gone.

It was a mixed class. There were Gentiles and Jews, English and Afrikanders. In the South African world outside the portals of the University there were factions, some behind Jan Christian Smuts in his war policy, and some bitterly opposed to the war, because they said it was England's war. In that class you could find as many factions as there were outside.

Hugh looked at Elsebe Joubert. He had talked with her a few times and politics had not come between them. He was English and she was Afrikander to the very bone.

The lecture over, he hurried out into the sunshine. There was nothing in the sprawling expanse of the Golden City to suggest that the world as he knew it might end overnight. A little cloud of dust rose from one of the dumps. It did not seem to matter that Hitler was coming; gold had to be dug from the guts of the earth, gold was more precious than anything else in the world.

"Hello, Hugh!" Elsebe was standing beside him. He looked down into the clear pools of her brown eyes. Her face was oval, her hair rich brown, her features small and perfectly sculptured. She was slight—the replica of one of her Huguenot ancestors. Her teeth were small and even and white, like a puppy's.

He greeted her. "I did want to talk to you," he said.

"I saw you brooding right through the lecture," she replied. "I'm walking home."

They walked along the wide thoroughfare and into the street where tram-lines ran down the hill.

"I don't want to go home," he said, "and I don't want to go into town. Let's take a bus right to the end of Jan Smuts' Avenue and we'll walk into the country. Will you?"

"All right," she said.

The bus slid along Jan Smuts' Avenue. The terminus was on the edge of the country.

"A few miles down the road," he said, "there's an hotel. Let's eat and then walk."

The veld rose to blue horizons, to the feet of the Magaliesberg mountains, which far away seemed to touch the blue parasol of the sky. The grass was golden and sear.

"Some day," he said, "we'll walk all the way to the mountains and look down on the golden world."

They walked to the top of a hump-backed koppie and sat looking away from the city. He turned to her. She saw the worry at the back of his eyes. His mop of fair hair was tousled. He was plucking handfuls of dried grass.

"I'm miserable," he said suddenly, his voice charged with vexation.

"I know," she said.

"How do you know, Elsebe?"

"It's Dunkirk," she whispered.

Then the steel band seemed to snap from round his heart.

"That's it," he said. "I had to talk to somebody and when I looked round the class I knew it was you. And then you came to me while I was waiting."

"I imagined that you must be feeling like my people when they were conquered in the Boer War."

"And you are not glad that England is in a tight corner?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I'm not glad," she said. "I hate this war because of all the sorrow. I hate it because it has reopened

the wounds of our people. You know, I dream sometimes of a united South Africa, of all the hate between the people dead and buried . . . but it's only a dream. Perhaps I wanted to talk to someone as much as you wanted to talk to me. But I'm here to listen to you to-day."

"I must join up," he said abruptly.

"But you've only a few months before you qualify."

He clenched his fists. "That's what my people say. But there's no time to waste now. Don't you think I am right?"

"What do you think you'll be fighting for?"

He laughed rather harshly. "I've thought it all out. I believe I'll be fighting for decency, for the right of man to live, for freedom. There's a little sentiment in it too—England. England was to me the country of my ancestors, just that. I didn't agree with my people when they talked about it at home . . . but memories of things which were lost have come into my heart. That's all."

She sat up and put a small hand on his shoulder. "And if you are killed?" He caught the panic in her voice.

"Somebody must be killed to make the world safe for freedom," he said, and he saw her slip back into her shell of passivity.

He added. "People have been killed in Holland, in Belgium and in France. Men are dying in Dunkirk now. I can't go on sitting in lecture rooms listening to men babbling while the world is burning. I know there is no glory in war. I thought that the promises of the old men, the politicians, the Churches and the schools would be kept, that never again would war come to blight the faith of youth. But it is here, and I can't argue myself out of this war any longer." His voice was low but charged with passion. "I don't want to die for the mistakes of old men, I have much to live for . . . but you see, it seems to me that if I don't fight for the future there will be no future."

She was staring across the vast veld. The grasses shimmered in the heat of the sun, and the sun had flushed her face.

"There's nothing I can find to answer all that," she said.

They seemed then to have known one another for a long time. Neither of them tried to fathom the new experience. They were both children of the sun-sodden land, and they belonged to it just as the veld and the mountains were part of it. They were both mistaken in thinking that they were bound to the traditions and the cultures of the European peoples from whom they had sprung. They belonged to the rolling veld, to the wild storms that raged suddenly in summer, to the clear sun of winter, the sudden burst of spring, the langour of the mauve autumn.

They sat and stared on their country. And he said: "What are you thinking about?"

"Of when you'll be going," she replied.

"To-morrow," he said. "To-night I'll fight it out with my people."

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"Of when you'll be going," she replied.

"To-morrow," he said. "To-night I'll fight it out with my people."

"But you won't be going away soon?" she said.

"Smuts is calling desperately for men. The Italians are waiting on the Kenya border. They'll be in with the Germans any day now and we have only a handful of men to try and stop them."

She looked again at his eager face. She would hold him back if she could, but she knew that he had made his decision. She felt close to him. It had all happened suddenly that morning when she saw him watching her. She had not sought to be caught in the vortex of the ugly war which was now devastating Europe. She had not thought much about it, although at home her father and brother were always talking about the end of England. She felt her heart threshing . . . all the time she wanted to tell Hugh Wayne not to go to the war. She wanted to say that the clash in Europe had nothing to do with him.

His old light-heartedness had returned. She remembered him then as he was in the swimming pool at the University, taking the highest dive. She saw him in the University sports winning the hundred yards and even the mile. His long gait, his fair hair caked with sweat, his broad smile. She remembered that he took little part in the debates. He had tried but he seemed shy and awkward, fumbling for words. He was at his best in the open, tall, powerful with the frame of a fighting man.

But now for the first time she had learned that he could express himself well . . . at least to her.

He was the first to close the gap of silence. "Elsebe," he said, "I've been wondering what your people think of the war."

"They are all against the war," she replied, "except Mother. She doesn't say much."

He was astounded. "And you listened to me so patiently and helped me make my decision."

She faced him with frank eyes. "You had already decided, Hugh," she said.

They walked back to the road and when they got on the omnibus he said: "We'll drop at our house and I'll see if Mother's car is there."

"No," she said, "I'll go into town and get my bus."

"All that way—no," he said. "I'd like you to meet my mother."

Beyond the Zoological Gardens, Parktown was bathed in the glow of the afternoon sun. The suburb was well-named for the gardens of the big houses were parks, tree-laden and spacious. It was the suburb of the thriving Rand business man. It exuded prosperity.

Hugh's home, "The Cotswolds," was a double-storey brick-built mansion. Elsebe, as she walked with him up the drive, thought that she would not change her own home, a Dutch-gabled cottage in Rossmore, for all the grandeur of the Parktown house.

Secretly she was hoping that Mrs. Wayne was not in. She knew that a society woman in Parktown thought that she was made of

better clay than an Afrikaner girl from Rossmore. That thought almost made her laugh.

Mrs. Wayne was in. She was having tea in the summer house with some other women. They were all expensively dressed and perfumed, all simpering.

"Hello, Hugh," his mother called. She came over the lawn towards them.

"Hello, Mother," said Hugh. "This is Miss Joubert. I'd like to take her home in the car."

Mrs. Wayne swept Elsebe from feet to head with a quick glance.

"Who is Miss Joubert, Hugh dear?" she asked.

"A friend of mine at 'varsity, Mother. She lives at Rossmore."

"Oh, I see." She glanced at her son.

"Miss Joubert, do please come and have tea with us."

Elsebe was introduced all round. She drank her tea and heard talk of the day's events . . . and not one word about Dunkirk. Elsebe felt like choking.

She breathed again when Hugh drove the car out of the drive. Along the Empire Road boulevard the trees were bare. The road ran into a suburb with very poor houses, and thence under an avenue of stately gums to Rossmore.

Hugh drove her to the gate of her home, a cottage far back from the road and the garden was framed in gums.

"What a charming place!" said Hugh.

"It is delightful," she said. "Thank you and good luck."

He waved to her. His mind was thrumming with the engine of the car as he drove home.

CHAPTER II

JOAN WAYNE knew there was going to be an argument. Hugh had gone to his room after his return from taking the Joubert girl home, and although at first she had itched to question him, she had desisted. Philip, her husband, was grave and tight-lipped when he came home from the office. He had listened to the six o'clock news relayed from Daventry . . . its blare had filled the house. She knew that Hugh was also listening in his own room. Four rooms in the house had wireless sets. Joan Wayne would mention that casually to her friends. Now she wished there was not one set in her house. As she had dressed slowly and deliberately she closed her ears to the news . . . it was black news. Better not to listen. It would not always be black. She had superb confidence in England weathering the storm no matter how desperate the position was now. She did not think of Britain, only of England, and England was London. She had not been at all interested in the old Cornish village whence her father had come to the Rand goldmines. England was London, the city of gay shops and theatres, of Buckingham

Palace and Westminster Abbey. She hated Hitler merely because he had dared to challenge the might of England.

She chose a semi-evening gown of blue velvet, and she took pains with her make-up. No use letting her men down at a crucial time. She would not let them talk about the war. There had been something grim about Hugh's face when he had brought the car back. In spite of her decision her heart fluttered, and she was afraid.

She found everything cosy when she entered the dining room. A fire of logs burned in the grate. The Zulus, John and Joseph, were standing by the door in their white uniforms. They always had two waiters at "The Cotswolds." True, they were for ever changing them, for native servants were not what they used to be. They had lost the old obedience. Joan Wayne had never considered it servility.

They were tall, brown-black, imposing. They chorused: "Good evening Madam." She had taught them to do that. What wonderful teeth they have, she thought as she slightly inclined her head.

"Ring please," she said.

John tapped an old Chinese gong. Its sound ran through the house and up the stairs.

Philip came in first. He walked over to the fire and stood with his back to it. "It's a bit nippy," he said.

"Yes, Philip."

"How's Hugh?"

"All right," she said after a pause. "Why?"

"Did he say anything about this rotten mess at Dunkirk?"

Her heart missed a beat. "No," she said. She walked across the room. "What do you mean, Philip?"

"He might want to join up again."

Before she could reply Hugh came in. "Hello, Dad," he said. "The news is bad."

"Rotten," said his father.

"Oh, you men," said Mrs. Wayne. "I forbid you to talk about the wretched news. Come and eat. Hitler won't come here."

"Don't be too sure," said Hugh, and he tried to laugh but it was forced.

The murmur of the world came into the house, the world they knew, the honk of a motorcar, the high voices of the black folk in the street.

Hugh stared across at his father. Philip Wayne was a successful advocate. His dark lean jaw was the jaw of a lawyer. The eyes were piercingly blue. Hugh had always known that his father was handsome, but never so much as now. He watched his profile thinking how he was going to hurt him soon. The lawyer would put him in the witness box and perhaps tear all his arguments to bits . . . but he just could not give in.

And from the corner of his eye Philip was watching his son. He knew what was coming. Never let a witness tell you what he

wants . . . you make him tell you what you want. That was how he worked in the law courts . . . but now?

"How's 'varsity, Hugh?" He would keep him talking about things that did not matter, but Hugh replied bluntly:

"I was half-listening to a lecture this afternoon and I was staring at the mine dumps, and all the time my mind was in Dunkirk."

"Why be so morbid, Hugh?" his mother said quickly.

"Morbid?" He put down his knife and fork. "Morbid when the lights of the world are going out?" His lips were tight. "I'm sorry, but listen, I have attended my last lecture . . ." and after a pause, "until the war is over."

"But you promised, Hugh." His mother's mouth fell.

"Sorry," he said, "we won't talk about it until we've finished dinner. Then we can talk it right out quietly."

His father said: "That's fair enough."

But she could not eat any more. She felt that she was in the evacuation of Dunkirk. The bombs were whistling down on her head. Her world was crumbling, for all her world was wrapped up in her only child, Hugh.

She sat listlessly by the fire. They came and they took their seats and neither of her men wanted to start talking. Hugh waited. He did not have long to wait. His father filled his pipe, lit it and then said calmly: "We have had this argument before, Hugh. We have stripped it to its bare bones and we agreed that you should finish your course. You'll get your degree in six months. Then you can join up. After the war is over if you want to be an advocate you will have to get your degree in law. That will take another few years . . . but your mother and I conceded that you could not wait so long before doing your share in this war. Please wait a few months."

His mother was waiting on his words with open lips.

"It's Dunkirk," said Hugh. "France will fall and the Germans will rule all Europe. How can England stand alone against Hitler?"

"England must already be a gigantic fortress," said his father.

"I don't believe it," said Hugh. "England has been asleep."

"How can you say that, my dear?" His mother's simpering voice smote him until he squirmed. "Hitler will never take England."

"All that's beside the point, Mother," said Hugh. "What's the use of my finishing my course if Hitler wins? What will there be for us if he conquers? There will be no university, no freedom, no life. I want to fight because I'm afraid that we shall lose all the things we value. If everybody said 'I must finish my job of the moment and then I'll fight,' the war will be lost."

Philip Wayne had no honest answer, but he was a lawyer, and he was the father of an only son.

"Your promise?" he insisted.

"But then there was no Dunkirk."

"Dunkirk, Dunkirk . . . I hate the very word," his mother screamed.

"Please, Joan, please."

She put a sudden stop on her flow of hysterics.

His father looked Hugh square in the face and his jaw tightened.

"I forbid you to join up."

Hugh jumped to his feet. "So that's it? You are great patriots talking, talking about the glory of England, filling my heart with England all through my life. Now England is in dire straits and suddenly she has become a far-off country . . . almost a foreign country."

He kept a halter on his voice, but his words bit. "Weigh your patriotism, it is outweighed by your hypocrisy and your fears."

His father rose, his face ashen. "That's a cowardly thing to say."

"I'm sorry," Hugh said quickly, "very sorry." He sat down abruptly. "I want to talk quietly. I don't want to use bitter words. I know how much you care for me . . . but it seems to me now that we must strip ourselves of our fears and face facts. I can't go on waiting and waiting. I feel I amfunking."

His mother was crying now. "There are plenty of young men left at the University, my dear."

"Yes, Mother, but I'm ashamed to be among them. I know there's a lot of sense in what you say . . . but the position is desperate. I may be just a number in the vast scheme of things but I know deep in my heart that the call cannot be denied any longer."

The fire crackled and the fire in her heart was burning up the last hopes of Joan Wayne. Her son belonged to her and not to any country in the world. He was all she had. If she had six sons she would give five, but it was not unreasonable to ask that she be allowed to keep one.

"You'll go when you finish your course," she said. She was again the dominating personality in the nursery and Hugh was no more than a child. She laughed. "Fancy, Philip," she said, "Hugh brought a little girl home to-day and she had tea with us, and who do you think she was . . . a Miss Joubert, a friend of Hugh's at the University."

"Oh yes?" said her husband, "why shouldn't he bring a friend home,—but who is she?" Philip Wayne clutched at a straw like a dying man. He wanted a little time. He wanted the court adjourned. "With a name like that she might easily be anti-Smuts," he said.

Hugh sensed that he had been side-tracked, but he was tolerant now. He had hurt them to make them understand that he would not shift.

He said: "She said that her people were against the war and I told her that mine were so English that they were real jingoes."

Philip Wayne knew that he was caught. He made one last

desperate thrust. "We like our traditions and we are fond of the country whence our people came . . . and you call that jingoism."

"I can understand the Afrikaner who will not fight for England, but I can't understand the Englishman who wants to wait for a miracle," Hugh countered.

His father stirred. "You ought to be an advocate," he said. "How you hurt."

"I know that you know that the position is dark, and as a lawyer you are afraid of the judgment," said Hugh.

His mother seemed to come out of a trance. "Has England ever been defeated, Hugh?"

He replied acidly: "She has never been in such a position. She put her trust in old men who should have been undertakers instead of statesmen." Then after a short silence he added: "I'll go out for a stroll. You talk it over. I don't want to say any more bitter things."

They did not answer and he accepted their silence for consent. He walked up and down and around the garden. The trees were naked in the starlight. He could pick out the skeleton branches of the fruit trees.

"Well, Joan," said Philip Wayne, "he's got us in a cleft stick!"

She wiped her eyes and nodded. "What if we lose him?" she said.

"Many will lose their sons in this new burst of lunacy," he said. "And this time we may lose all, even our self-respect."

"You want him to go," she challenged.

"No, but we have no honest answer to his arguments."

"Men are always stubborn," she said. "I'm not brave and I'm making no pretence to be. I'm selfish. If I could I'd run away with him to America, anywhere where there is peace. Mothers do not bear sons to be cannon fodder. They bear them that they might live."

He threw a log on the fire. There was a sudden blaze.

"It'll take some time before he is fully trained to go to the front," he said, "and I do think that Hugh should be an officer. I was talking to old McAllister, editor of the *Rand Gazette*, at the Club to-day, and he was really angry. Many of his men, he said, went off to join up and came back with commissions in a few days."

The sudden picture of Hugh in the uniform of an officer was not enough to ease the heartache of Joan Wayne.

"You're letting him go?" she said.

"Yes, Joan."

"I won't stand it."

"It doesn't matter what you do, he will go."

"My head is bursting," she said, "I'm going to bed."

Philip was sitting with his pipe unlit when Hugh returned.

"Where's Mother?" Hugh asked.

"She has a bad headache, Hugh, and she's gone to bed. You

ought to understand. After all, you're all she has." He was speaking quietly. "I know you won't change your mind." He coughed. "We won't argue any more, but I do think you should be an officer."

"But there's no time, Dad. Fighting men are needed."

"Leaders are also needed, Hugh."

A new bitterness came into the young voice. "Dad, why do we worship things that don't matter? This time let's get away from our snobbery. I don't want to be an officer. I'm too young, too inexperienced."

"It would ease the blow for your mother."

There was a long silence. Then Hugh said: "I want to get into the fight quickly. I'm sorry, Dad, but something happened to my heart to-day and to my mind. I would give so much to be with those men in Dunkirk. I feel that now classes don't matter. Men count for their very selves."

"But you have breeding Hugh, and you have mixed with fine people."

Hugh felt the freedom which was nearly within his grasp, the freedom in the flight of a bird. He said quietly: "Your people and Mother's people came from Cornwall. They were mining people. They were poor, and when they came here they worked hard. They were fine stock and I'm glad that I've sprung from them."

"You're hard," said his father, "the young are always hard." His eyes burned. "You will not concede one little thing to our pride. What's wrong in people being proud of their son, I ask you." He shrugged his broad shoulders. "You'll join up, and will you remember this—that we're giving all we have, everything?"

He saw the threads of pain on his father's face. "I know," he said limply, "but you see, Dad, we have never talked as man to man. Now the world is in flames and the young know that they must build a new world this time. I'm not mature like you, but I do know what the young people want."

"All right, son." A great calm seemed to have come into his father's mind. He had faced the inevitable and he had lost. "You'll be going to-morrow I suppose?"

"Yes, Dad."

"Your mother seems to be a little worried about the girl you brought home," he smiled. "I've watched her watching you when the girls of her choice have come here. You understand?"

Hugh wanted to laugh but he curbed himself. "It's nothing, Dad, the girl is a classmate. To-day I was desperately lonely and I talked to her. Her name is Elsebe."

"Elsebe?" said his father, and he seemed to taste the name on his tongue. "What a lovely name."

"Yes, Dad, I think so too."

Philip Wayne looked across at the radiant face of his son. He

saw how wide apart the eyes were, sincere, ardent eyes. He would miss him. He had been too busy for years now to talk with his boy. He remembered him best as a curly-headed, chubby baby in the nursery. He had grown up into a tall youth, nearly six foot, and it was only now that he noticed it. He felt that he was going into the valley of heartbreak. He had given too much time to his work, to his career, to building up a fortune for the son whom we had never really known until this night. But he hid his feelings in the lawyer's mask of his face.

And the son looked at the face of his father. He admired him for the eloquence which was the talk of the courts, and even for his success, and he remembered how angry he was back in that September of 1939 when General Hertzog moved his neutrality motion in the House of Assembly at Capetown, and how he stormed, "There will be civil war if Hertzog's motion is accepted."

And Hugh remembered how his father had laughed when General Smuts had knocked all the props from under the anti-war party and sent Hertzog into the political wilderness. He remembered, too, how his mother had raved against the disloyalty of the Afrikaners who had supported Hertzog.

Since then he had often thought that he should have joined up at the very beginning of the war, when their hate was aflame, but at first he had not been over-interested, and for a long time it looked as if it were a phoney war. They had rejected his plea when the Low Countries were over-run. They told him that the Maginot line and the combined might of France and Britain would withstand any onslaught by the crooked madman of Europe.

"I'll be going to see how your mother is," his father said.

Philip Wayne and his wife stopped talking when they heard Hugh dialling a number. He was speaking in Afrikaans which his father understood. "Is that you, Elsebe? I've just rung to tell you that I'll be wasting no more time at the University."

"What did he say?" asked Joan Wayne.

And Philip Wayne said heavily: "He was telling the girl Elsebe that he won't be going to the university any more."

"Elsebe?"

"Yes, that's her name, Hugh told me."

Joan Wayne stared at the ceiling. "Please put out my light," she said. "If you listen to the late news please don't let it fill the house. I hate Dunkirk."

CHAPTER III

PIET JOUBERT and his son had also listened in, not only to the Afrikaans news but also to the English. They lapped up the story of Dunkirk greedily.

Piet Joubert was small and stocky and he wore a beard. He had been clean-shaven until a few years before when the hundredth

anniversary of the Great Trek had swept the Afrikaners on waves of emotion into something approaching hysteria. The story of the Voortrekkers captured the headlines in the Afrikaans press for months, and even the English press carried glowing stories of the trek, which a hundred years earlier had carved history from the Cape to the Transvaal. The Afrikaners returned to wearing the costumes of the trekkers in the great ceremonies which were held in every city and dorp in the land. Old trek wagons were brought out. Voortrekker dances and old songs were revived. The Afrikaner thought of his heritage, and many of the men returned to wearing beards. The story of the Voortrekkers became the subject for sermons from every pulpit of the Dutch Reformed Church throughout the land.

The pulpit became a political rostrum. The die-hards kept the flame of their hate burning. The cleavage between Boer and Briton was for them a chasm which could not be crossed. The country, they argued, belonged to the Boer, and the Englishman was a usurper. Great schemes were born of the Trek ceremonies, plans for capturing trade from the British and Jewish sections. Cultural associations sprang from the emotion of worshipping their ancestors . . . an association like the Ossewa Brandwag captured the imagination of tens of thousands of people. During the Great Trek the Boers made fire-breaks around their laagers of wagons and Ossewa Brandwag meant the Ox-wagon Sentinel, or literally the Ox-wagon Fire-watch.

Piet Joubert and his son Carl were members of the organisation. The aims of the Ossewa Brandwag, its leaders had always said, were cultural, and it existed to further the ideals of the wanderers who had trekked out of the Cape in their covered wagons because they wanted to live a life of full freedom. They insisted, moreover, that the old Boers had trekked away from the oppressive laws of the English in Cape Colony.

The story of Dunkirk was manna to the father and son. Carl lounged in his chair. He was long and lean, with the face of an ascetic. His eyes burned . . . they were black in a pale face. Carl had also grown a beard during the Great Trek revival, but he knew that it did not suit his long face, and reluctantly one morning he had parted with it. He was on the staff of the Afrikaans newspaper *Die Brand*. He was uncompromising. He attacked everything English. He would never forgive the people who had conquered his people.

He was a chain smoker. His mother, Martha, looked at him and said: "Carl, I wish you wouldn't smoke so much."

"I've tried, Ma, but when I'm excited I've got to smoke."

Martha sat knitting. She seemed much older than her husband. She was quiet with kind grey eyes.

Elsebe was sitting on a pouf in the corner, trying to read but the lines ran into each other. During the Trek festivals she had put

on the Dutch kappie, had worn long print dresses and taken part in Boer dramas. She had been proud of the men who had won their way through flood and famine and through the ranks of the hostile black men across the Vaal . . . but the surge of emotion had lasted no longer than the ceremonies.

She wondered what her father and her brother would say had they known that she had talked with an Englishman who wanted her advice about going to fight the menace of Nazism. She wondered if it were a menace . . . but she was sure of one thing, she did not want any victorious strangers to come to her country and start all over again a new racialism. The Germans must remain in Europe, even if they did win the war.

"Adolf Hitler is the greatest general the world has known," said Carl through a cloud of smoke.

"Greater than Napoleon," his father conceded.

"The English are squealing," said Carl, and there was a fanatical light in his eyes. He seemed to be challenging a denial, although he knew none would be forthcoming. "Hitler will cross that ditch of a channel and he'll be in London by August just as he said he would. Everything he foretells comes to pass. Germany has found a prophet."

His father looked at Carl and smiled. Some day, he thought, Carl would be one of the leading politicians in the country.

"Yes," he said, "when the great power of England and her Empire attacked the little Boer Republics for over two years we held them at bay. Damn them, they killed my father. And you, Martha, you were born in a concentration camp because of the English. You'll be glad that their doom is upon them."

She looked up from her knitting. "I hope it's all over soon, Piet. What do people want to go to war for? It only brings sorrow, and the young men die."

Suddenly Elsebe said: "Hate never was a soil for good growth."

Carl pierced her with his eyes. "Why, Sis, what's the matter with you?"

"Oh, nothing," she said, "but you know, Carl, you suddenly appeared to me like a cat worrying a mouse."

He laughed out loud and choked with a rasping cough. He cleared his throat. "Why," he chided, "have the Jews and English in College got your pity? They must have looked miserable enough to-day."

She was silent.

"Save your pity, my child," said her father. "The people who are now being beaten to their knees spread fire and sword through this, your country. They could not beat the gallant Boers with their vast armies and their big guns. They fired the farms. They destroyed the crops . . . they took your grandmother, and she was young then, to a rotten concentration camp." His voice was charged with venom. "Our people died in their hundreds in those camps,

and the English didn't care. You should read what Carl is now writing about those camps—the utter misery of them, the terror, the disease. There your mother was born.”

She remained silent.

“And they came,” Carl took up the tale, “because they were the greediest nation on earth, because there was gold on the Rand, . . . they came to help the Jews, and the English, the opportunists, the bloodsuckers, to ravish the Rand. It was a war for gold.”

His long fingers plucked a cigarette from a tin. “They got the gold and ruined the country. Old Paul Kruger was right, it was a sin when gold was first found on the Rand.”

“I know all that is true,” said Elsebe, staring into the fire.

“And do you believe,” said Carl, “that a nation must pay for its sins?”

“I’ve never thought of it, oubouet,” she said.

He gave her a warm smile. She had called him ‘older brother,’ her affectionate term. “You’re all right,” he said. “Of course, it is a pity that our young women don’t take more interest in politics. But when you become a teacher you’ll go among our people and I hope you’ll go out into the country among our poor, then you’ll see how they live, they who should share in the wealth of this land.”

She felt that she had said enough. They would go on glorying in the agony of Dunkirk, and she confessed to herself that last night her brother’s smug self-satisfaction had not hurt her so much. She knew now that she could never glory in the defeat of a nation. She knew that the way to the salvation of the world was through peace and understanding and not through the bomber, the hideous weapon of modern war.

Branches of the jacaranda tree tapped on the roof. The coal fire glowed. It was a comfortable night. The room was homely, a few comfortable chairs, rows of books by the inglenook, and the mother knitting . . . there was an atmosphere of peace, but the minds of two men were away on blood-drenched beaches, and they had no pity.

Elsebe listened to what she had heard a thousand times before, cruel slandering of the Jews. Not that she cared for the Jews—but they were a people, and her heart was never against any people who suffered. She heard again how the Jews and the English had captured all the business in the land, how they controlled all its financial institutions.

And there was nothing new in what Carl said. “This time we’ll send them out of our land, pack them off like cattle. We’ll use our gold to buy up-to-date machinery for our farms. The gold will belong to the people.”

He got up and tuned in to Zeesen. It was time for the Afrikaans broadcast. There was dead silence. The story of Dunkirk came, gloating, blood red, the announcer was smacking his lips. Carl and his father hung on every word.

"The people who began this war are doomed," said the announcer. "The French armies are in full flight towards Paris, but the German armies are on their heels. The British armies are caught in a trap and they will be annihilated unless they surrender."

Figures, colossal figures, were given of Allied losses. Carl smoked furiously. They listened, too, to the English broadcast from Zeesen and again the gloating satisfaction in the voice of the announcer thrilled Carl and his father. They did not like to listen to the English tongue. They would never speak it unless there was no other way out in the course of business. . . . Piet Joubert was a clerk on the railways and there were English people who ignored him when he talked Afrikaans. But soon his language would be the only language.

Carl read the English newspapers so that he could keep well-informed, to read between the lines of the insincere leaders and to write his own devastating commentaries. He never believed a word he read in the English press, but now they were useful. They were filled with fear and dread. Nemesis was knocking at the door. And when the voice of Zeesen turned into German, reluctantly he turned it off. He promised himself once again that he would learn German.

"Pa," he said, "I wonder how Jannie Smuts feels to-night?"

"He's got out of some queer traps but here is one he'll never get out of, Carl."

They laughed together. They stopped suddenly when Martha said: "Leave him alone. You can be politically opposed to Jan Smuts, but there's one thing you can never say about him—he never was and never will be a coward."

They gaped. Martha Joubert had never spoken so many political words in her life. She was talkative about the weather, about the price of food, about the sorrows of the poor, but in politics she had always been dumb.

"You, you," spluttered her husband. "Woman, you were born in a concentration camp."

"But Jan Smuts that time was fighting the English, Piet."

Carl waded in. "Yes, and then he sold us out after the war. He is more imperialist than the biggest English jingo. Ma, what's come over you?"

"Oh, leave her alone, Carl," said Elsebe. She closed her book with a snap. "We've been sitting here listening to your raving. Mother's people came from Holland. Look at Holland now."

Carl and his father flung questioning glances at each other.

"Go on, Elsebe," said her father.

"I've nothing more to say except that I don't think it's manly to gloat when men are dying. I'm not thinking about England and France but about the men who are dying, fighting with their backs to the wall for their countries. That's all."

"Good God," said her father, "I never thought that my daughter would ever have any sympathy for the enemies of her people."

"It's not that," Martha interposed, "it's just the woman's heart in her. I wonder what Jesus Christ would say to all this." She put down her knitting and her lips were set. "If I read my Bible aright I am sure that to-night He is hurt to the heart."

Carl's face was contorted. "Oh, don't drag religion into it, Ma. Religion has nothing to do with this war. Anyhow, who began the war?"

"I really don't know. Your paper said that England and France did. The *Rand Gazette* says that it all began when the Germans attacked Poland. I don't know."

Carl opened his hands and shrugged. "So you see, I think women should not bother their little heads over the war. The *Rand Gazette* and all the lousy English press are hard put to it now to find excuses for the coming defeat of England, that country of hypocrisy, that despoiler of small nations."

He got up. "I've been tied to my desk all day." He grinned: "And to the radio all night. I think I'll get a breath of fresh air. What do you say, Pa?"

Stiffly his father rose. It was cosy by the fire, but with Carl out of the house there would be no-one to talk to about the war, about the new South Africa which was to rise out of the ashes of the doom of the British Empire. He would gamble his life now that that doom was approaching.

"All right, Carl," he said. Martha said quietly: "The walk will do you both good, but you'll please put on your overcoats."

"You dominating old girl," said Carl, and he went to her and kissed her. "Yes, we'll wear our coats."

Just before they went out she added: "And don't go to our cousins, the Van Rooyens."

Carl laughed. "Oh no, they must be as gloomy to-night as their idol, Jan Smuts."

The door closed on them and the women heard their laughter as they walked down the garden.

Martha looked over her knitting. "It's such a pity, Elsebe, that there is so much hate in the world."

"A thousand pities, Ma. You know, it's queer, but somehow my heart went cold as ice when Carl and Pa were glorying so much in the horrors that must be taking place this night on the beaches of Dunkirk."

Martha put down her knitting and took off her spectacles. "I'm glad you feel that way, my child," she said, "not that Carl is really hard of heart, but his antagonisms have been fanned into hates. I think we spend too much time on politics." She smiled wanly. "People differ. Our cousins the Van Rooyens are all for Smuts and the war—but the war will pass, my child."

There was silence. She must tell her mother about Hugh Wayne. She knew that she would understand. It was then that the telephone rang and she got the message.

She returned slowly to the hearth and sat in her father's chair "Who was that, Elsebe?"

"Oh, a friend of mine, Hugh Wayne. He's joining up to-morrow." And trying to be casual she told her mother about her talk with Hugh, but under the tone Martha Joubert sensed a deeper feeling.

"We are just friends, Ma," she said.

"And your cheeks have lost all their colour, Elsebe." But again came that smile which warmed her heart, that smile which came so spontaneously to the face of her mother.

"We'll pray for him," she added, "and we'll hope that he'll come home when this ugly war is over and peace reigns in God's world." When Elsebe did not speak she went on "You are just friends, you say. Remain so, for I cannot see why in the world two South African children, the one English and the other Afrikaner, can't be friends. But you'll watch your heart, my child."

"Yes, Ma, but you won't tell Pa and Carl, will you?"

Her mother's eyes opened wide. "Of course not, they wouldn't understand—not yet. And remember you told me that you would watch your heart."

They were so close to each other. Always Elsebe had been able to go into her mother's arms with all her troubles and doubts. She knew that although her mother had not read more than a dozen books, apart from the nursery books which she had helped her to read when she was small, she had more wisdom than was contained in the covers of all the books in the great library at the University.

One book Martha treasured—her Bible. On its flyleaf it had the family tree, the names of the ancestors in the Great Trek. She often used to say: "Books and papers . . . I know all I want to know from God's Book."

"Come along," she said, and Elsebe sat on the rug at her feet. "Tell me about Hugh of the big house in Parktown."

And Elsebe told her of his vigour, of the clear blue of his eyes and the tall frame, and how he was an only son.

"And the English are ready to give their only son," said Martha. "Like the old Boers did in that unequal war against a mighty Empire. They must be a fine people. I would break my heart if Carl had to go to a war."

Elsebe did not tell her that Hugh had had to argue his way into the army.

"You must be tired, Ma. You should go to bed."

"I'll make coffee for the men when they come home," said Martha.

"Let me make it," said Elsebe.

"All right then. I've taught you to make coffee. We Afrikanders can make it," she laughed.

She stared into the fire again, and prayed that Elsebe would not be hurt if she did fall in love with the English youth. Her men,

she knew, would be aghast at the prospect of Elsebe marrying out of the Afrikaner race. They had been talking a lot since the Voortrekker ceremony about the purity of blood. Purity? The Afrikaners were mixed, Huguenot and Dutch, German and French, and by now there was quite a lot of English blood in the race. Piet and Carl knew well that there were unilingual Afrikaners with English and Scots names. But what use to argue? There was enough bad blood with all the theories which were being expounded.

In her simple way she loved her land. She knew that she would feel lost in any other land.

She heard her men coming up the garden path. Elsebe came in with steaming cups of coffee.

Carl announced: "Pa and I will wait for the late news from London. In a few weeks the English tongue will be torn out of the air."

He did not notice the look which Elsebe flung at him. Martha saw it and for a moment she was alarmed.

"Elsebe and I will go to bed," she said.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN the Nazi beasts were shot out of the Dunkirk skies, and the mists came foiling the hunters in their round-up which they thought would end the war, the pro-Germans in South Africa were not dismayed. Most of the people who were opposed to the war opposed it, as did Carl Joubert and his father Piet, merely on the grounds that Smuts had led his country to fight alongside Britain. They were pro-Hitler.

They were sorry that Hitler had not been able to give the *coup-de-grâce* to Britain at Dunkirk, but they were satisfied that he was all-conquering and that he would sweep across that ditch of a channel. The shock came to the people who believed in the war, to people like the Waynes. Joan Wayne now realised that the war would be long and bitter. She knew that Britain would have to fight for her life as never before, but she still had a superlative faith in England. She felt sure that a miracle would come.

Philip Wayne did not believe in miracles. All he hoped was that across the Channel the England he loved was armed to the teeth, but a doubt kept gnawing at his heart.

But it was only when the fall of France staggered the world that the equanimity of the City of Gold seemed shaken. It was incredible, impossible, France with the greatest army in the world to topple almost overnight. Now there was no certainty in anything, not even in gold, that L.S.D. which was the unholy trinity of the city. Worry shook the people who had suddenly awakened to the reality of the war. Many rich men gathered their wealth and their families and bolted to America. Mussolini stabbed France in the back.

A big Italian army was facing a small African Colonial army on the borders of Kenya. The Italians would sweep down over Africa, through the Rhodesias and across the Limpopo, and the gold mines of the Rand would be in enemy hands. Didn't everyone know now that the prize of all the world was the gold of Johannesburg?

Pro-Hitlerites had not given much thought to the Italian as allies. They had been angry with Mussolini when he attacked and annexed Abyssinia, because they were afraid then that it was the beginning of Italian aggression which might reach to the borders of South Africa. They had not been concerned with the use of poison gas against raw natives in Abyssinia—after all the Abyssinians were black men—but they could not tolerate the thought of Italian domination in Africa. Now they decided that if the Italians were good enough for Hitler then they would have to accept them.

As Carl put it to Julius Theron, one of his colleagues on *Die Brand*, Hitler just wanted to use the Italians, and when his purpose was achieved—the complete defeat of England—he would give Mussolini what the lion gives the jackal.

But when one night he used the same words to Elsebe she said: "But don't you think, Carl, that Hitler might consider every race but his own as jackals?"

Carl reddened. "Nonsense," he said, "I am convinced that the Fuehrer does not want our country, for instance. He will want to help the true Afrikanders to drive out the English, that's all."

"But what of our gold?" she asked.

He laughed. "He is fighting the war without gold. He is showing us how valueless it is when it is used in the way we use it." He searched her with his keen eyes. "In any case don't you bother your head about these things. The war will be over in a few weeks."

She was glad that he had terminated the conversation. Somehow she felt terribly afraid. She had thrilled to the story of the evacuation of Dunkirk, which she had read in the *Rand Gazette*. She felt that it was an honest, unvarnished story. It was too bitter for the blow to be softened, and truth could not be camouflaged. She thought it a miracle of courage. These thoughts she confided to her mother, and she saw that Martha was worried.

"Don't worry about something which has nothing to do with you, darling," she said.

"But the army was saved, Ma. The mists came—wasn't it like a miracle?"

"It was a miracle," her mother conceded.

"Carl says it won't be long now before the war is over."

"I know, Elsebe, and I think that God would be glad if it were over now."

She looked into her mother's face. "But Carl doesn't think like that."

"I know, but then you see Carl is an intellectual and I am just a simple woman, and I'm glad that you have a heart like mine."

They often talked by the fire. The men were seldom at home now during the evenings. They were meeting other men . . . they were planning for something. Martha was secretly worried.

Hugh Wayne was being turned from a raw rookie into a fighting machine. He and his fellows knew that they were being rushed through their training and that any day they would go "up North" to meet the Italians.

The camp was cold, the training in the open veld was rigorous. The dust rose in clouds, choking their lungs. The barracks were like barns. Hugh during the first few days went down with influenza. Many men died of pneumonia . . . but the rush went on and on. The Italians would be moving into Kenya and down through the Rhodesias perhaps.

Hugh toughened quickly. He was pushed about like a boy at school and pitched among all types of men, men who had given up good careers to fight for freedom, others who had come to get a kick out of life, some who still believed that there was glory in war . . . poor men and rich men. Some were very intelligent and many had not a thought among them.

Happy men, who after the first long terrible tiredness of body and spirit found their muscles toughened and laughed at the antics and the anger of instructors. They sang their evenings out. They wanted to get away from the monotony into the fighting line. It was many weeks before Hugh came home, and when he did even his mother blinked. He was brown and fighting fit. He talked little . . . he was glad to sit and listen.

Philip Wayne was proud of his son. He had forgotten the argument. In fact he forgot very quickly. What he saw now was a young giant who would be a match for half-a-dozen little dagoes, as he thought of the Italians.

"It's going to be tough, Hugh," he said one night. "The Italians and the Germans have had a long start. I'm afraid that we'll have to be on the defensive for some time."

"Yes, Dad," said Hugh dreamily, "like a boxer."

His mother broke in: "To think of all the young men still gadding about the city and the world in such a desperate position. And the young Jews who don't seem to understand that we are fighting Hitler to save them."

"No, my dear," said her husband, "that's not true. Everybody seems to be talking about the Jews, and I suppose they're doing it in the army too. I don't like it. The whole thing smacks too much of Hitlerism to me, and I believe we do intend to crush Hitlerism. I wish there were conscription."

It was Joan Wayne's turn to smile. "The town is saying that were it not for the Jews, Smuts would bring in conscription tomorrow."

"What about the Afrikanders who are opposed to Smuts?" asked Hugh.

"It's the Jews the people say," his mother insisted.

It was no use arguing with his mother, his father knew that too. Hugh in a short time in the army had found English, Afrikanders and Jews together. He had heard some of the fellows saying that the Jews were funking, and he relished the memory of the time when Michael Weiner, a German Jew, had brought dead silence into the canteen when he answered the jibe. "I'm a Jew," he said, "a German Jew. I came here and I found freedom, and here I am to fight for freedom." He was stockily built with a powerful pair of shoulders, dark and bright-eyed. No-one had taken up the challenge. But Hugh immediately fell for the honesty of the man and that night he had talked to him. He would like to bring Michael Weiner home. He would also like to bring Dirk Cilliers, the Afrikander, the son of a poor farmer in the eastern Free State, that young brown-haired giant who had quietly joined Michael and himself. Somchow the three seemed to be natural friends. They would go together into the battle against oppression.

Secretly Philip Wayne felt proud that his son was in the ranks. When he looked round the Gold Club, the most exclusive club in Johannesburg, he saw a bunch of old dodderers, physically and intellectually. Most of their sons were officers. He was certain that Hugh was going to revolt against the old order, that his very sincerity would find him in time far away from his mother's ideas of what life should give him. Philip Wayne was honest enough to admit that he and his fellows had failed to build a decent world, that they were selfish and self-centred, and just as honestly he hoped that Hugh and his fellows would build a world to last. They were going to bleed for it.

"Will you be going soon?" Elsebe asked Hugh one day.

"I think so," he replied. "The Italians are mustering on the Kenya border and they might break through at any minute." And he confessed: "I was afraid about Dunkirk."

He looked closely at her. Had she not told him before the old life suddenly stopped that she was not interested in the war? He thought for a moment that she might like Dirk . . . but then he dismissed the thought. Dirk was intelligent considering that he had had little or no education, but Elsebe Joubert would in a few months be going out into the world as a teacher. Suddenly he said: "What are you doing to-night?"

"Nothing. I'm a little tired of books."

"Then I'll get one of the cars and we'll drive out into the veld somewhere."

He took his father's car. His mother said that she was using hers to go to a bridge drive in aid of the Red Cross. He wondered why it was necessary to have bridge drives to raise money for the great and merciful organisation.

As he drove out from Johannesburg the roads were lined with cars. The war seemed a million miles away. There was plenty of petrol, the food larder of the city was overflowing, and life seemed to go on in the same wild rush in the City of Gold. Out of town the air was clean and cold.

The car climbed a hill and Hugh turned and pulled up by the side of the road. Far away the city was alive with lights, like a fairy city. The sky was a cold blue hung with big stars. A young moon was in the sky, a sickle of gold.

"How is life at the old dump where the nation's intellectuals are being taught to build the new world?" said Hugh.

"Just work," she said.

He took her small hand. "When I go up North," he said, "I shall write to you."

"I'll write to you, too," she said.

"I do want you to be a link for me down here where life will go on in the same old way, I think."

He felt her hand tighten. "Are you so sure that we shall not be caught in the war?"

He smiled. "Sometimes I think it wouldn't do Johannesburg any harm if it were caught up in it. This is a world war, and it wouldn't be fair for this city to escape. After all, we all made this war."

"How?"

"Because we didn't care."

"But how could we care?" Her voice was warm. "We are young you know. And why should you take on your shoulders the responsibility of the world?"

"Michael told me," he said—"Michael Weiner, the German Jew, my friend. He was a Doctor of Philosophy in Germany. You'll have to meet Michael. But perhaps you don't like Jews."

"My brother Carl hates them," she said.

"And you?"

"I've never given them much thought."

"Meet Michael," he repeated. "My mother dislikes Jews. Perhaps I did in a vague way . . . but I've been thinking . . . these people are just like us. And there's Dirk, my Afrikaner friend. I never gave much thought to the Afrikaner, although I've long realised that racialism is all wrong. But it didn't hit me between the eyes as it has done in the army."

"I know what you mean. I, too, have been thinking about racialism lately."

He drew her close. He liked her warm eyes and her oval face and her smile. Elsebe often smiled. Suddenly her face would break out into dimples and then she made a picture which slipped into your heart and stayed there.

She told him about her mother.

"She sounds sweet," he said. "I must see her before I go away."

And she knew sitting there beside him that he had slipped her consciousness and that nothing now could drive him on lovely the sky was with the eyes of God looking down on veld . . . and yet over the seas and across Africa there was war, and men were dying . . . for what? She shuddered.

"Are you cold?" he asked quickly.

"No," she said. "I sometimes wonder what young men are dying for."

He said: "Michael could tell you much better than I could."

She did not ask him to explain. Her brother Carl had answers for any arguments a German Jew could produce. She realised that Carl and Hugh moved in two different worlds. She said: "I'm very ignorant. I would like to see your friend Michael."

"I'll ring you when I bring him to town."

"And Dirk?"

"You'll meet him, too. He'll make a great soldier."

There were moments when they allowed the great silence to envelop them and they were afraid to break its stillness. She looked up at his face and measured the strength of his chin. There was a ruggedness about the face of Hugh Wayne.

When many days later she met Michael and Magda his wife she understood why Hugh liked them. At one moment Michael's big brown eyes would be solemn and dreamy, and then suddenly they would be swept by fire.

That happened when Elsebe asked: "Mr. Weiner, did your people suffer much in Germany?"

"My father was murdered," he said. "The last I heard of my mother she was in a concentration camp."

"I'm sorry," she said. "Let us not talk of it."

She would like Carl to meet the German Jew, but she knew that Carl would never be persuaded. His thinking floated in a swamp of hate, his world was a narrow world of fanaticism. She had told herself lately when she had felt the awakening of love in her heart that she must remain outside the hate of the war.

Dirk Cilliers was a big, awkward lovable backveldier who spoke little. Elsebe saw how Hugh with his clear mind and better environment took him under his wing—a man two inches taller than himself.

CHAPTER V

OUT of Johannesburg the roads loop for miles past the mine dumps into a network of small townships, every one dominated by its dump. The dead, golden river of the great reef runs under the ridges of the Witwatersrand and the river has many tributaries. Johannesburg lies over the heart of the reef and along it lie the smaller townships and every one on a vein of gold. These little towns are thriving.

Like the rich barmaid of a stepmother who reared them they are restless and feverish.

From the veld with its eternal fight against drought and pest the Afrikaner came to work in the mines. The big money of the old days had gone but there was more in mining than in fighting erosion and the drought of the veld. The Reef townships grew up with a mixed population of British and Afrikaner and certainly more Afrikaner than Briton. When the Afrikaner from the veld settled in the Reef townships and brought his politics with him, when the torch of the Ossewa Brandwag flamed through the land, it touched the minds of many thousands of the Afrikaner goldminers. And Carl Joubert was one of the first to see that the miners would be valuable to the movement. He had spoken at many meetings along the Reef. He was eloquent and persuasive, his Afrikaans was faultless. He could infuse his listeners with much of the fanaticism which burned in his own restless heart. He was a combination of preacher and politician, and to the Afrikaner the predicant and the politician were personal heroes. It was Carl who had suggested that pretty girls should attend the meetings to pin the Voortrekker badges on the lapels of the big lusty miners. He knew the romanticism in the Afrikaner heart. The badge depicted a torch on top of an old Voortrekker wagon.

"Put that torch into your hearts," he would tell them, "and let its flame burn until you die. And remember the old wagons which brought our people out of the land of bondage."

He often smiled inwardly when the miners took the oath of allegiance to the organisation. They merely undertook to play traditional Afrikaner games and to observe Afrikaner traditions. They promised to perpetuate the ox-wagon spirit.

From the outset he had wanted the movement to be more militant; but he had been persuaded at first that the time would come when the Ossewa Brandwag would lead a revolt in the land. Just as in the organisation of the Voortrekkers the Ossewa had commandants and veldcorners. Just as the Boer commandos had gone fighting the black men and later the armies of the British Empire, he was told by some of his associates that the time would come when the Ossewa commandos would sweep down on the rich smug Englishmen and Jews.

"You see, Pa," Carl told his father, "rifle and target shooting are part of the training of the Ossewa men. Don't you remember, the old Voortrekker had a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other."

That was before Hitler had marched against the world, and Carl had waited with restlessness gnawing at his soul. He did not like to handle guns. All his life he had been a student and a poet, but he determined to revive the Boer traditions and turn South Africa into a republic with the ideals of Paul Kruger in the forefront.

As soon as the war had begun he preached revolt and he took his plea to the leaders of the Ossewa. Gradually he felt that they

were afraid, that they were not the men to lead Afrikanerdom to complete freedom. He was sure of their cowardice when he found them swapping hopes among themselves when Hitler sprawled across Europe and it seemed that nothing could save the British Empire. He heard them talking openly that the hour for freedom was within their grasp, but when he asked for action they would not move.

"What will Hitler think of us if we do not make some attempt to break down the war machine which Jan Smuts is building?" he had asked them.

They replied that when Hitler conquered all Europe, the South African war machine would crumble overnight.

"Let's do something to smash it," he said.

They smiled and tried to look important, as if they knew that without lifting a hand all their dreams would be crystallised. Had they been as full of the fight for freedom as he was, he would have followed them even to a martyr's grave, but he decided that they were not the men to launch a crusade, to keep the Voortrekker torch burning in the hearts of the people. His voice was not alone; all around him he could hear Ossewa voices demanding action.

He drew his father with him into the crusade. Piet Joubert was not brave. He was a good cock on his own dunghill. He had come under the influence of the rhetoric of his son. Whatever he did was for Carl. Because Carl said so he was convinced that the English yoke was real. Carl told him that although the South African parliament had a majority of Afrikaner members, even in the United Party, and even though Jan Smuts was an Afrikaner, the life of the people was dominated by the finance kings of the City of London. And whatever Carl said was gospel to Piet Joubert.

Before and after Dunkirk they went together to meetings of the inner circle of the Ossewa held in the Reef towns, in miners' houses and never twice in the same house. It was easy to rekindle the fire in the hearts of the sons of the veld.

Away from the Reef there were also a few farmhouses where weapons and dynamite were stored. Carl had long foreseen that there would be no men like miners for using dynamite. But in the inner circle there were chemists, welders and engineers, and contact was being made with men in the military technical services.

Sabotage. That was the key to Carl's plan to disrupt the peace of the land. His eyes burned when he looked over the converts to the crusade, big men, powerful and strong as oxen.

One night he and his father were driving in his car out of Johannesburg. They saw the mine dumps rising in the dark and heard the pulse of the big mines beating. In the shadows black miners were going to work, wearing tin hats and carrying carbide lamps. They were silent men.

"When we win back our land," said Piet, "we'll send the black man where he belongs, back into his reserves."

"Ay, Pa," said Carl, "and the gold will belong to all the people." He was lighting a cigarette as he was driving. "That will be a great battle. I doubt whether our leaders really want that. They, too, are wolves in sheep's clothing. But we shall bomb them out of their wretched surety of ruling when we have won the revolution. The men who will rule will be those who have planned and carried out the *coup d'état*. If we take leaf by leaf out of Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' we can't go wrong."

His father grunted in assent. But there was fear gnawing at his spine. "You're sure, Carl, that the meeting will be quite secret?"

"As secret as the grave," said Carl.

He could easily read his father's mind. They both knew that Martha was worried but they had not spoken about it. Her questioning had never been deliberate, but she knew they were playing a dangerous game.

The road was as smooth as glass. Cars swept past under the line of the long lights. The veld stretched to infinity from the roadsides. After an hour's driving they reached one of the Reef towns, drove through the main street which blinked with robots, and then Carl turned into a byway and took several turns before he stopped at a small villa. Every villa in the street was a twin.

They entered a parlour crowded with men. They were mostly young. There was one man who was obviously a predicant although he did not wear a parson's collar. He was a lean ascetic and his eyes glowed. His name was Daniel.

It was he who spoke first. He said: "We are the men who will light the flame which will sweep this land like a veld fire. We may die in the attempt, but what of that? We shall all die some time, and it is better to die fighting than like an ox led to the slaughter. From their graves the ghosts of the Voortrekkers, the phantoms of the Boers who died in the war against tyranny are waiting to lead us through danger and fire to the resurrection. That is the only way to the resurrection, my Afrikaner friends."

Carl heard all the hearts beat as one.

"We shall only fail if our hearts fail," said Daniel. "Perhaps among us is one with the vision and the courage of Adolf Hitler. I think the man is a demi-god. He will conquer wherever he treads and he will tread the soil of Africa. And when he comes we can show him what we have done for Afrikanerdom. German blood flows in many of us . . . that is the blood that will rule the world, the blood of the masters of the new universe."

He paused and his voice quietened. "Not a man here will dare play the coward. Cowards will die. To-night each of you will take the new oath, the secret oath."

They came, the Carls, and the Johanneses, the Petruses, Stephanuses and the Nicholasses. They stood before Daniel and with the left hand on the Bible and the right hand uplifted they swore to work for the overthrow of the system, pledging themselves

to the whole cause of Afrikanerdom, and submit to death at the hands of one of their colleagues of the inner-circle if they should prove false to their oath.

Then they sat at a round table. Daniel placed plans on the table and called three men. They looked at the plans and then burned the papers. One by one the men left. Carl's father was waiting in the car while Carl had a few last words with Daniel.

Daniel said: "The men are all right, Carl."

"Like rocks," said Carl. "I shall be near to listen."

"I, too, shall listen, Carl."

Many nights later they drove back to the outskirts of the town. It was a Saturday night. They had seen in Johannesburg crowds going to the theatres. There was little to show that the country was in the middle of the greatest war of all time, except for a few soldiers on the streets.

Carl drew up by the roadside under a clump of pines. His father's voice came through the darkness. "What's going to happen, Carl?"

"Oh, don't be afraid," said Carl tersely. "You'll hear an explosion which will rock this town and its reverberations will reach Johannesburg, just as the silly people come out of the theatres."

"Bombs?" The word was like a bomb.

"Yes," said Carl. "But don't worry. Nobody will be killed to-night. We will not kill—yet."

How restless his father was. He could hear him clenching his pipe with his teeth. Again the voice came through the darkness. "Don't you remember, Carl, somebody was killed when early in the war a bomb was pitched into a street in Johannesburg?"

Carl nodded. "Yes, I remember, but that job was done by amateurs. To-night's job will be done by experts."

But Piet full of his own uneasiness could also see that Carl was fretful and worried.

It was as quiet as the grave. Then suddenly there was a loud explosion followed by two more. The little town seemed to shake to its foundations. Flames leapt up. Carl drove off. He travelled at no more than thirty miles an hour. After they had gone some twelve miles they were pulled up by a police car. They had to get out while the police searched and found nothing. Carl's heart was beating quietly now.

Piet was proud of his son as they drove on. He had been so cool while the police were questioning him.

In the morning they read the story in the *Sunday Herald*. Seventeen shops had been wrecked by an explosion in the Reef town. Many of the shops belonged to Jews. Martha's eyes searched the faces of her men. They pulled masks over them and she saw the masks.

Over lunch she said: "Whoever is responsible for last night's bombing should be ashamed."

Carl reddened but he kept his voice under control. "Why, Ma? After all, the shops belonged to Jews."

She, too, bridled her voice. "Why use bombs to express hatred of the Jews? It's not manly, Carl."

He thrust out his chin. "I can understand how hate can use bombs."

Elsebe had been listening quietly. He swung round when she said deliberately: "Did you have anything to do with it?"

He laughed loudly to hide his confusion. "I don't know a bomb from a depth charge."

Piet Joubert felt the food sticking in his throat. He clutched a glass of water and drank greedily. Then he laughed. "What's all this nonsense?" he said, and his voice was severe. "What's it got to do with us?"

"Nothing I suppose," said Martha. "I was thinking how we would feel if we had a shop and found it all in ruins."

After the meal the men went to rest and Martha and Elsebe sat in the garden. The grass was dead. The only green was in the tips of the gums. The sun was warm and the vista of the veld from the garden was a soft blue. They sat away from the house.

"Surely they couldn't have had anything to do with it, Elsebe?"

"Have you been thinking that they have?" asked Elsebe.

"I am afraid," said Martha.

"But, Mama, they know nothing about bombs as Carl said."

"They did not let them off, that is obvious. But I watched Carl as he was reading the newspaper. He began immediately to look for something he knew would be there."

Martha stared across her neighbour's garden away to the veld. Then her eyes settled on the church spire in the heart of a hill suburb. She fought her fears. She would wait and watch. She was so honest herself that she did not understand subterfuge in others.

There was the inevitable listening to the news in the evening, and eventually the Zeesen news came. Zeesen announced that explosions had wrecked a street in a Reef town, and the name of the town was given.

"How could they know so soon?" asked Martha.

"Through secret channels," announced Carl.

The insipid voice of the announcer went on: "And, dear friends and listeners in Africa, who do you think could have committed this outrage? The newspapers will tell you that it is the work of that fine cultural body the Ossewa Brandwag, the only true Boer organization in the country. Don't you believe it. We think that it is the work of Smuts, and you watch him putting the responsibility on his political opponents."

The voice trailed off and then there was dead silence. Carl broke it with an uneasy laugh. "What do you think of that?" he asked. "You know, it seems to make sense."

Elsebe flung a quick glance at him.

"Zeesen is lying brazenly."

"Why?" Carl shot back.

"Because it doesn't make sense." She appealed to her mother with a look.

Martha said: "It is a gross libel. I wonder why people, yes people like you and your father, Carl, want to have anything to do with such liars."

Carl jumped to his feet, anger flaring in his eyes. He was about to talk, but she said: "Sit down, Carl," and he obeyed. "I would give my life for you Carl, for any one of you. I do not know much, but I know I heard an evil thing on that radio just now."

Piet took his pipe from his mouth and interrupted: "It has come to this, Martha—are you with us or against us?"

"I always voted the way you voted, Piet," she said, "and I would vote with you again to-morrow, but this is different. This country is in a war. People who want to fight the Government by unconstitutional methods must pay the price, and the price might easily be death. You and Carl are precious to me and I have no sympathy with your pro-German sentiments. I am an Afrikaner and I owe no allegiance to any German."

She threw some coals on the fire. She had taken the wind completely out of their sails. They were dumb for many minutes and then Carl said lamely: "But, Ma, what was wrong in my saying that Zeesen was clever?"

"You didn't say that," said Elsebe. "You said that it made sense. I read somewhere that the Reichstag fire was the work of the Nazis. They seem to think that other people can do such things as easily as they can."

Carl shrugged. "You see, silly, everything is fair when you want to reach the goal—everything. Just as everything is fair in love and war. You wait until you fall in love."

He laughed and ended the conversation on a light note. Then he said that he was tired, and went to bed. They were all tired.

In their room Piet said to Martha: "Why have you changed?"

"I've not changed," she said. "I have a feeling that Carl is running into terrible danger."

"And what about me?"

"Oh, you," she said as she peeled off her stockings, "Carl is the leader and you are one of the sheep."

And Piet marvelled at the wisdom which had come to his wife. He was tied to Carl but he was glad that Martha was watching them both.

CHAPTER VI

THE Springboks who were in the vanguard of the army which was to challenge the Italian menace in the North felt that they were fit enough to go into the war. In the dusty camp one evening when the sunset flamed across the vast sea of the veld the whisper went round that embarkation leave was to begin.

Hugh had put all his heart and strength into the work of soldiering, tearing across the veld, bayoneting sacks of sawdust, handling Bren and machine guns, shooting straight with a rifle. Out of the workshops the tools of war poured . . . there had been so little with which to fight when the war began . . . a couple of old tanks, an obsolete armoured car, out-of-date rifles. Already the new recruits were being trained without arms. The fighting men who were to go north wanted all the equipment that had been forged. The First Brigade had already gone in July and now it was September, the time of blossom. The men who were to follow the first Springboks would be incorporated in the First Brigade.

In three months Hugh felt that he was trained to the utmost. And when he found that both Michael and Dirk were also given embarkation leave he knew that they would be going together.

He arranged for them to come to dinner one night during their leave. Dirk arrived first and he stood at the gate gaping. Riding on the tops of trams and omnibuses in Johannesburg he had seen such houses. He thought of the little mud house of his people in the Free State. Gingerly he walked up the drive feeling that he would rather be in the battle line. But Hugh saw him and went out to meet him.

"Hugh, man," he said, "what a castle of a house you have."

Hugh said: "Come, you'll feel at home in no time."

Dirk scraped his feet on the mat although his boots were dry. His hands fumbled. He was taken into the drawing-room where rare pictures hung, where the furniture was all of stinkwood, the most expensive of all South African wood. He felt like a little frog about to be caught in the long beak of a stork. Mrs. Wayne swept in.

"So you're Mr. Cilliers," she said. "How are you?"

He bowed awkwardly. He took a chair and knew that his knees were shaking. Hugh offered him a cigarette. He inhaled deeply and sat like a piece of petrified wood. He was glad when he heard Michael at the door.

Michael was completely at home, speaking English slowly but purely and calling Mrs. Wayne "Madame." He looked around the rich room and Dirk knew that he had seen such things before. He kept a halter on his tongue for he spoke English painfully. But then Mr. Wayne spoke to him in Afrikaans.

"Mr. Wayne," said Dirk, with a round smile, "you speak our language well, better than Hugh does, man."

"I'm a lawyer," said Philip Wayne. "Two languages are spoken in the courts and I must be proficient in them both."

Mrs. Wayne asked Michael if he also spoke Afrikaans.

"Of course, Madame," said Michael, "I've been in South Africa for two years. The first thing I did was to try and master English and Afrikaans at the same time. No man can make a living in a country if he does not speak the language, and there are two here."

"But you speak perfect English," she said.

"Thank you," said Michael.

Philip Wayne looked from his son to his companions at the dinner table. They were a fine trio, a credit to the Springbok army. Dirk soon got through his bottle of beer . . . and that made his tongue a little easier. He stopped fumbling with the knives and forks. He had more beer and beamed. He had admired Michael before this night, but now . . . what a man indeed. He would tell the people of the Free State that all Jews were not rogues and usurers. And all the English were not proud. He was not sure of Mrs. Wayne. Often when she simpered he felt cold water running down his back. Never had Dirk had such a meal. The fish melted on his tongue, the meat was so tender. The Zulu waiters looked as if they had stepped out of a tub of starch. He was beginning to feel happy.

They sat round the fire after dinner, although it was not very cold. They drank coffee. Dirk swallowed his, but decided to himself that they could not make coffee. Hugh's father produced cigars. The room was full of feathery smoke.

There was that woman's voice again, it seemed to be tinged with fear.

"Why should young men go to war?" she asked, with her eyes on Hugh. "Why did you join up, Mr. Cilliers?" He stared at her.

"I dunno," he said.

Philip Wayne interposed. "Would you like to speak in Afrikaans, Dirk?"

"No, sir," said Dirk quickly. "In an English house we Afrikanders speak English. If an Englishman comes to my mother's house and—little English she knows—but English she will speak."

"How fascinating," said Joan Wayne. "I was born in South Africa, but you see I never have occasion to speak Afrikaans."

Hugh squirmed. "We'll forgive you, Mother," he said. "But, Dirk, you know why you joined up."

"Well," said Dirk slowly, "my people are so poor and small the farm is and poor the soil, and seven children my father and mother have. Tired I was of the poverty. And I wanted to see the world . . . but I think I joined up because I can give my people most of my pay. It's hard to be poor."

"Poverty will have to go after this war," said Michael.

"But the world's all right," said Mrs. Wayne, "what's wrong with it?"

"Madame," said Michael, "it is based on wrong values, on the sacred rights of property and not on human values." His eyes clouded. "My people were rich, but, of course, it wouldn't have helped if they had been poor. In Germany Hitler decided to wipe out all Jews. He is doing it. But as I see it, there could have been no place for a Hitler in a happy world."

"Why did Hitler attack the Jews?" asked Mrs. Wayne.

"Because he wanted to take the minds of the people from his real purpose—planning for war. Because he wanted to blame the position of Germany on something which was not German—although the German Jew was as much German as any German. It was simple to whip up hate against an industrious people like the Jews, easy to whip up envy and malice." He paused and bit into his cigar. "Jew-baiting is a popular pastime." Then he said quietly, "I'm sorry. I'm not here to tell you of the miseries of my people."

"Please go on," said Philip Wayne.

"I liked Germany," said Michael. "It's a wonderful country, but I never want to see it again. I suppose Hugh told you that I am doctor of philosophy of Berlin. I had a post in the University of Heidelberg. I was there after Hitler came into power. My students turned their backs on me and my colleagues ignored me. So I had to resign. I went home to Berlin. My father was not there. One day a storm-trooper brought his ashes in a casket. My father's property was sold to the Nazis for a hundredth part of its value. I ran away . . . my mother would not come. I was married, you see. My wife was an M.A. of Vienna. She now works in a hat shop in Johannesburg."

"And your mother?" said Philip Wayne gently.

"I had hoped to bring her out after me. But the last I heard was that she was in a concentration camp."

"Now, Mother, do you understand what Michael is fighting for?" said Hugh.

She nodded. "I'll leave you," she said.

When she had gone Philip Wayne said: "It's my fault. She has lived in a sheltered world, in this shell," indicating the house. "She spends all her time working for war charities, and she is tired. Tell me, do you think we shall crush Hitler?"

"Such evil cannot go on for ever," said Michael. "I hate it as a mother must hate the pain which hurts her child. If I die, well, what of that?"

Dirk broke in: "Michael man, you mustn't be killed."

Michael's laugh was rich and round. Then he became serious again. "I wouldn't want to live on in a crooked world. This time we must make no mistake. We must get rid of the evils which make dictatorships and wars."

"And there must be no poor people," said Dirk.

"Yes, Dirk, you're right."

Philip Wayne coughed. "I'm glad that you are Hugh's friend,

Michael," he said. "I never subscribed to anti-Semitism because I knew it was evil. But you must know the people are saying that the Jews are not joining up as they should."

"I know," replied Michael. "There are also many Gentiles out of the army. I'm not concerned whether a man is Jew or Gentile. But you see I'm not a citizen of South Africa. Thousands of Jews are not naturalised. Some have told me that they would fight if the country would recognise them. I fight because I can see so much to fight for . . . but answer me this . . . why should men fight for a country that treats them as foreigners even though they are in the army?"

"I have no answer," said Philip Wayne.

When Dirk and Michael had gone Hugh said: "Well, Dad, what do you think of them?"

"Grand fellows," said Philip Wayne.

Both Dirk and Michael refused Hugh's offer to drive them home by car.

Dirk was going to sleep at the soldier's club and Michael was going to his wife's flat near Joubert Park. They decided to walk home. It was a fine night and they were full of vigour and good food.

The young plane trees were beginning to shoot their green. They were silent for a space as they walked up the street. A tram clanged by and a native boy came down the hill on a bicycle, singing at the top of his voice. He held a light in one hand, a candle in a cup of grease paper.

"I'm damned, Michael man, if the kaffir isn't the happiest man in the land though he's cuffed about."

"I wonder why the white man likes to cuff him," said Michael.

They spoke in Afrikaans. Michael whenever possible talked Afrikaans with Afrikanders.

Dirk stopped. "You were talking about the new world in Hugh's place. What's going to happen to the kaffir?"

Michael stopped too. "He's going to get a better deal," he said. "You know, Dirk, I'm tired of all the talk about Jew and non-Jew, English and Afrikanders, white men and black. Every man must get a fair chance."

"But the kaffirs, man."

"Yes, Dirk, and the people you call kaffirs."

Dirk was puzzled. "Ach, man, we'll have plenty of time to talk up north, I suppose. But I'll never see things with your eyes. I'm not a doctor of philosophy. I only went to a farm school."

Suddenly a car pulled up. There were three men in it. The driver leaned out and said in English thick with an Afrikaans accent: "Like a lift, you fellows?"

Michael was about to accept when he felt Dirk's hand on his shoulder. In an accent as thick as the driver's, Dirk said that they preferred to walk.

Suddenly the men jumped out. They shouted, "Jannie Smuts's stooges," and Michael felt a fist on his chin and he toppled over. Dirk measured one of the men and floored him. Michael jumped to his feet and was into the battle. The man knocked out by Dirk crawled into the car. Dirk's knuckles smashed into the face of another adversary. Another car was coming down the road and the assailants got into their own car and drove off.

Michael sat on the kerb. "I had a smasher to the chin," he said.

Dirk felt Michael's jaw. "Nothing broken," he said. "The swine."

"Who were they, Dirk?"

"Ossewa Brandwag bastards," said Dirk. "Hell, if they hadn't run away they'd be corpses by now."

Michael knew of the organisation, of its credo and its aims. He had heard that soldiers had been waylaid and beaten up by gangs of toughs and that the Ossewa had denied that the ruffians belonged to them.

Dirk was eloquent. "I joined the Ossewa, Michael man, when it first started. It looked good to me, getting together the Afrikaners to take an interest in the traditions and the ideals of the old Boers who trekked through the wilderness into freedom. It sounded all right, but when politics came in I walked out. My people always liked Jan Smuts. Our family is all split about politics and some of them won't enter our house because we think Smuts isn't slim and all that. Michael man, you should have been in the farm school where I was taught. Politics crept in all the time. I wasn't very interested. Politics is the curse of this country," he ended.

Michael grunted. "But how can two men be held up in a street in the city?"

Dirk laughed. "Expect the police to be at every corner? But we gave them hell, didn't we?"

"It began like that in Germany," said Michael.

Dirk went to Michael's flat. When Mrs. Weiner saw her husband she stared. "You're hurt," she said in German. "Who did it?" She flung a hard glance at Dirk.

"Some toughs," said Michael. "Dirk, my friend here, scattered them." Then he added: "Speak English please, Magda. Dirk doesn't understand German and your Afrikaans is not yet good enough to talk with a Free Stater."

"But are you hurt, Michael?"

"No, my dear, not a bit."

Dirk swallowed Magda with his eyes. She was slight and dark with big, luminous eyes. Full of the story Michael had told that night he saw her as an M.A. of Vienna, a girl with a ton of knowledge in her dark head. He wanted to call her "Madame," as Michael had called Mrs. Wayne, but he knew that he would fumble it.

He stood awkwardly in the little room. "I'll go to the club now," he said.

"No. Please stay here. There's a couch, a good one although it's German made. We brought our furniture all the way from Germany. We could bring little else."

"Yes, stay here, Dirk," said Michael.

He knew that he would only offend them if he refused. That was also the way of the hospitality of the Afrikaner, but even this little flat which housed two refugees was richer than the mud house of his people. There the rats used to play hide-and-seek and clatter in the ceiling all through the night. All Dirk's reserve had gone. He was among people whose hearts were as honest as their faces. He told Michael's wife about his life in the rolling veld, while Michael was having a bath.

"When the war is over," she said, "we'll come to see you in the Free State. You see, I'm hoping that after the war Michael will be able to go to the University here and get a South African degree. He's a born lecturer. It broke my heart to see him going from office to office hawking cigarettes."

What stuck in Dirk's mind was the picture of Michael hawking cigarettes. He would have such a lot to tell the people who came to his mother's house. To-morrow he was going home for a week.

The couch was restful but he lay awake for a long time. He heard Michael and Magda talking. He knew that Michael was unhappy . . . you had only to look deep into his eyes sometimes, and sometimes when you caught him staring and not noticing anything or anybody around him, his heart was in his face.

The voices stopped. The heart of the city grew stiller except for the clang of a tram now and again. And Dirk slept and he dreamed that he was walking in the valley of the Golden Gate. It was full of the light of the setting sun and the world was beautiful like a painting.

CHAPTER VII

THE orchard of "The Cotswolds" was alive with blossom, peach and apricot and plum. The old mimosa tree towering over the gate was laden with its powdery gold. Hugh stood a long time in the orchard. Never until now had he stopped long enough to stare at the miracle of fruit blossoms, the lovely pink of the peach, the pure white of the plum. He wanted to put into his heart for keepsakes all the beautiful things. He would think of them sometimes . . . of flowers and sunsets and the sea sweeping ashore at Uvongo on the south coast of Natal, the passionate glory of wild flowers on the Cape mountains. He would remember the wild game in the Kruger National Park and how from his father's car he had looked into the eyes of a lion.

The trees were full of bees and their murmuring filled his world and his heart. He took a chair under the trees. He had been to

the University and had again seen the mine dumps from its lawns. There was a quiet dignity about the University which he would remember.

The streets had personalities now, the great shopping centre of Eloff Street, the crowded bazaars, the dignity of Pritchard Street, the wide Commissioner Street, the grand theatres. And every street was alive and rollicking with natives. He had gone beyond the squat Town Hall into the Indian quarter where every shop was a clothing shop, where the fez was the common headgear and the dark-faced Indians were everywhere and white faces few. He went down past the native Pass Office and saw hundreds of natives sitting on the kerbs, bedraggled, hungry and dirty.

Nicodemus the old garden boy was coming. Nic who had been with his people for over twenty years. His mother would point Nic out to her friends as the perfect retainer. In fact Nic did what he liked but he was a good gardener, with a growing hand. Hugh had often been told how when he was a baby Nic used to watch him as he worked. If there was too much sun he put the perambulator into the shade. If it rained he ran in and told Mrs. Wayne. And often he would be seen kneeling beside the perambulator talking and laughing with the baby. In those days Philip Wayne was young and struggling at the Bar and Hugh's nurse was a black maid. But it was Nic who looked after Hugh, and he called him Basie (Little Master) and Nic the Basuto never changed that name.

Times with his little spade Hugh had upset some of his precious work, but Basie could do what he liked. Nic could flare into a temper even with Mrs. Wayne . . . he had in fact been dismissed many times . . . but with Basie he was like a lovable dog.

His cap in his hand and the old quiet grin. "Hello, Basie."

"Hello, Nic. You'll have a good garden this year. I want you to give Mother great splashes of colour, tall zinnias and big dahlias this summer."

"Aright, Basie." Nic sat on his haunches and his face was troubled. "Wen you go, Basie?"

"It'll be all right, Nic. I'm going North but we'll only be fighting Italians and they can't fight."

"Wen you go, Basie?" Nic repeated.

"On Monday I go back to camp . . . but I don't know when we leave."

"You shoot with guns, big guns?"

Hugh nodded.

"You will be ver' careful, Basie."

"Oh, so careful, Nic. I'll come back alive I promise you. You see, you dear old woolly head, I like life. I like to run and to laugh but we must fight to keep our freedom, to keep this garden. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, Basie." And he rose, put on his cap and walked away. There was a lump in Hugh's throat. He would remember Nicodemus

and the garden. Now he was counting his treasures. He had found that there was a beauty in the gold town, the fine suburbs, a city of trees. He had listened to the laughter of the Bantu and he found it musical and rich. After all it was the town where he was born, a corner of the world that had nurtured him. Its skies were familiar skies. He had seen them without cloud and so clouded that they were as black as the devil's chest. He had watched the golden moon riding over the city of gold, heightening its beauty where beauty was, hiding the scars of the poorer suburbs, gilding the mine dumps into things of beauty.

To-morrow, Sunday, was the last day. He felt somehow that he would like to hold time in his hands. The night was restless, His room was full of the fragrance of the fruit blossoms, a white fragrance which hurt. On Sunday morning he went to the service at St. Mary's Cathedral with his parents. The people were asked to pray for the people of Britain now suffering under the terror and death of bombing. London was beginning to burn.

In the avenue of gums below Rossmore Elsebe was waiting for him. She was bareheaded and wore a dress of sprigged muslin. They drove by lonely farms nestling in the shade of trees and there were lambs on the veld, and once they stopped to admire the grace in a donkeylet. Again they sought a koppie and the veld stretched to blue horizons. They lay stretched in the sun staring at the cloudless sky. The silence was precious, it belonged to them.

He raised himself on his elbow and looked at her, at the slim form, and he saw the lights in her hair. And suddenly he pressed her close to him and he felt her small, round, apple breasts trembling under his hand. She gave him her lips . . . and he knew then that he loved Elsebe Joubert.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you," she whispered.

"When did you love me first, Elsebe?"

"That first day on the koppie in June when all your world was falling to pieces. When did you first love me, Hugh?"

"Just now, Elsebe. It came suddenly. I looked at you and you were beautiful." He paused, "and now I remember you began to change about the war just because you loved me."

"That's so, Hugh," she said.

"Wasn't that a great sacrifice?"

"When one is in love there are no sacrifices."

They made their vows. They were the only two people in the vast veld, and for the moment they held their world in their hands. They felt as lovers have felt through all the wars which have come to wreck the happiness of mankind and to milestone the bloody way of man's march to his destiny. They were the symbols of the heartbreak of men and women through the ages, the heartbreak that knows no frontiers and is common to all races, to all colours. They swept through the gamut of all the emotions which come to

the human heart. And he said: "I wonder what Michael is doing now? You'll have to go and see Magda when we are gone."

At that moment Michael and his wife were also sitting in the veld. They had gone out by omnibus to the end of the terminus on the Pretoria Road, and they had walked for miles and climbed a hill. Now they were lying close capturing the love they had known in the dead days.

And Hugh said: "And old Dirk—I wonder what he is doing."

At the time Dirk was walking across the lands. He was going through the Golden Gate into the mountains. He climbed steadily. He stared on his world. The evening colours were playing on the mountains, the rock doves were cooing, the river laughed in the valley. He loved his land but never more than now when to-night would bring the parting. He would break his heart, he said, if he were never to see it again. The shadows ran into the valleys and they darkened quickly. The colours rioted on the mountains, delicate pastel shades. Dirk felt God in the mountains, the God of his mountains.

The Gate was flaming gold. He held out his arms as if he would press the colours into his heart and his soul cried out. He was elemental, passionate. The veld, the green shawl of grass would come to it with the first rains . . . the veld was like his God . . . kind in season, hard too in times of drought, but it belonged to him and he to it, as the apple belongs to the tree. He knew that he would not sleep easily in his grave if his grave were not dug in the veld.

Scarves of colour running riot in the western sky, and the golden rim on the silhouette of the hills. He heard the Basutos call from mountain to mountain . . . their voices carrying like trumpets. He called and his call was flung across the valley. His most precious memory would be his Golden Gate.

Away on the Transvaal hill Hugh and Elsebe watched the sunset scattering its light, mauve and pink and blue, and they lingered in the blue darkness which came quickly over their world. They watched the first stars prick the sky.

And when Dirk wandered home the moon was rising full and round and dominating the sky.

Michael and Magda walked back to the city in the moonlight.

Elsebe and Hugh drove home. He took her to the cottage in Rossmore and the men were not at home . . . Elsebe knew that. They had gone to a Reef town in the morning and they said that they would not be home until late. Martha Joubert saw the light in Elsebe's eyes. Immediately she liked Hugh.

"God bless you," she said. He liked her simplicity.

"I'll see you to-morrow at the station, Elsebe."

"To-morrow," she said.

And when he was gone, Elsebe went into the garden. The moon was looking through the feathery tops of the jacarandas. Its light

flooded her garden. A little wind played in the tree tops and the garden was full of a whispering.

Her mother came to her. "I'm glad and I'm sorry," she said. "I'm so happy, Mama," said Elsebe, "and sad of course. He goes to-morrow."

The long night died at last. The long morning came. Dirk had travelled all night to get to Johannesburg. He hoped that he would never see his old mother weep so much again. She was not really old but life had gnarled her.

The Johannesburg station, an ugly barn of a place, was crowded. Joan Wayne took Dirk aside. She said to him: "Please be near Hugh always."

"Yes," said Dirk. How strong and big the Afrikaner soldier was. She felt that Hugh would be safe alongside him. She had sensed how much the big man admired her son. When she turned away from Dirk she found Hugh holding Elsebe's hands. She nodded to her. She was sure that when he went away he would forget Elsebe. When Michael introduced his wife to her she was struck by the loveliness of the Viennese Jewess. She had heard Hugh say something about her being an M.A. and that she was working in a shop, a hat shop. Perhaps she would call round some day and buy a hat.

And then she forgot everybody except Hugh. Tears welled in her eyes and he came over to her. "Mother," he said.

She dried her eyes quickly. The clack of tongues all around them, the sobbing of women. Children held high on their father's shoulders . . . Joan Wayne only saw her son, all she had in the world, and there he was going to the war because some hateful men wanted to dominate the world.

"You'll write, Hugh?"

"Often," he said.

Suddenly they found themselves without words. They looked into one another's eyes, and Hugh's eyes became moist. He felt his father's grip. "Good-bye, son," he said. "Look after yourself."

"Yes, Dad."

Joan Wayne turned her head away. She did not see Hugh kiss Elsebe. The whistle sounded and it smote her heart and wrung her soul. Now the soldiers were crowding into the carriages. Tears were flowing freely now, but Magda was not crying. She was just biting her lips. Michael looked deeply at her . . . he knew that she had cried all the tears in her heart in the dark days of flight and sorrow. And Dirk felt a little lonely and yet he was glad that there was none of his family there to weep for him.

Hugh watched the face of Elsebe. It broke into a smile, the old sure smile. That is what he would remember now and for ever. Bursts of laughter broke from some compartments. Soldiers had chalked slogans on the windows . . . "Off for Rome" . . . "We'll hang that old Duce."

The train moved . . . a multitude of blurred faces. Hugh looked

across the heads of the crowd . . . and there was Nicodemus with his cap in his hand, with his crooked smile as he raised his arm, and his voice drowned all other voices: "Good-bye, Basie."

And Hugh's voice rose over the clang and the crying and the cheering. "Good-bye, Nic."

Joan Wayne walked to her car in a dream and Nic was standing by the open door. He saluted his master and mistress.

"I didn't know that you were on the platform until I heard you shout. How did you know where the train was?" asked his master.

"I went many places an' I foun' the right one," said Nic.

When he was told that he could ride home with them he said: "No, master, Nic can't work to-day."

It was a lovely day, warm with the spring sun, but Joan Wayne shivered all the way home.

CHAPTER VIII

NICODEMUS waited in the street undecided. He had seen Basie kiss the little brown-haired girl. He watched her coming out of the station with Magda. He stopped them with his cap in his hand.

"Meisie," he said with his brown eyes on Elsebe, "I am Nicodemus. When Basie was so small"—he bent down and held his hand a foot or so from the ground—"Nicodemus look after him. I love Basie."

Elsebe's eyebrows shot up. She looked at Magda and saw her smiling.

"He's telling you that he's Hugh's servant," said Magda.

"I know," said Elsebe, "I heard him shout and Hugh's reply." She turned to Nicodemus. "Yes, but what do you want?"

"Nothin'," said Nic. "Ony, Meisie, Nicodemus is your slave. I will do anythin' for you if trouble come. You call me then?"

Elsebe understood. "Yes," she said, "I will call you. Thank you."

His brown weather-beaten face broke into a wide smile and his white teeth glistened.

"W'ere you live, Meisie?"

She told him and he said: "Nicodemus will remember." He walked away and they stood looking after him.

"Hugh did tell me about his old retainer," said Elsebe.

"What a dear old man," said Magda. "You know, Elsebe, he offered you his life."

"Yes," said Elsebe, "he is one of the old natives who hasn't been spoiled by what we call civilisation. Our old maid, Mary, is like that too."

Magda said: "I love the native people, and I hope when this war for human rights is over that they will also get a square deal in the world. At any rate, the world is unfair to the majority of

people, and when a person's skin is black . . ." she did not finish the sentence as if she could not find words to express the bitter, empty lot of the Bantu.

Elsebe looked at Magda. They were having tea together at the flat. She was very beautiful with her olive skin and wide-apart eyes, tawny like a lion's. She was alive in every movement of her supple body.

"We were talking about the natives. I'm afraid that it will take a long time to kill the prejudices of my people against them," said Elsebe. "It is only recently that I have seen the unfairness of it all."

"I want the natives to be treated like human beings, and that is not too much to ask, surely," said Magda. Her eyes clouded. "I'm a refugee. Michael is a refugee . . . we both ran from persecution and that is perhaps why we hate persecution so much. No people, Gentile, Jew or Bantu should be refused the gift of freedom. We know what it means. I wouldn't have let Michael go if I thought that the new world can't be won."

"Tell me about your other life, Magda."

Magda told her of the beauty of Vienna and the glory of the Bavarian mountains, of villages nestling in forests, of panoramas, of great institutes of learning.

"I do not want to go back to a land where the people were so easily poisoned that they lost all sense of decency. I was so Austrian that I disliked the very names of England and France and my people felt like that too. But I lived to see them hollow-eyed and tragic, and then I saw them looking to England as the only safe place on earth. My father was a professor. The Nazis made him sweep the streets. He is dead now." Her face was white. "I shall never forgive them. Michael's father also died under the hands of the Nazis."

"It is all so difficult to believe," said Elsebe.

The colour was coming back into Magda's cheeks. "Sometimes I can hardly believe it myself," she said simply. "Sometimes I have thought that it was a horrible nightmare. But it is as true as the gospel."

Silence came between them and Elsebe felt her heart threshing. She knew that it was all true.

"Perhaps," said Magda slowly, "you can understand now why I feel that there must be no oppressed races?"

"Yes," said Elsebe.

"You must be proud of Hugh," said Magda, "as proud as I am of Michael. He is a great soul is Michael, unselfish. When we ran away from hell he was my only comfort." A slow smile lingered on the beautiful face, and watching it Elsebe was comforted.

"Let us meet often," she said.

"Yes, often," said Magda. "We shall read between the lines of their letters the things they will want to hide."

Magda kissed Elsebe. "Good-bye," she said, "and if you find yourself in trouble remember old Nicodemus."

In the omnibus on the way home Elsebe watched the life of the city passing by. The natives were coming out of the factories. So many of them were tattered, like scarecrows. Magda had opened her eyes a little. She had seen these black people evening after evening . . . she had looked on them as a people apart, the people who had tried to stop with the assegai the march of the Voortrekker armed with a gun. And she smiled thinking of Nicodemus.

Nic took the tram to Sophiatown, the black town, one of many on the outskirts of the city where his people lived. The tram was crowded—it always was, and he heard the clack of many native tongues, his beloved Sesutu among them. He could talk with any native because the native tongues were merging into each other, but personally he liked the pure language which he had learned in the kraal on the mountains of Basutoland. The tram was full of laughter too—it was always so. The white man, thought Nicodemus, could squeeze the black man like an orange but he could not squeeze the laughter out of him. He noticed for the thousandth time how arrogant the white conductor was, how he was half afraid to take the fares from the black hands, as if he were sure the hands were unclean.

He had aunts and uncles and cousins in Sophiatown and they all lived like a tribe in one back-yard. There were many children, lovely picannins, and he was sorry for them. They had never seen the great mountains and many of them never would . . . they would live and die in the backyards of Sophiatown. He went every week to chat with his people, to hear news of Basutoland. Sometimes he went to the big church and sometimes he got royally drunk on kaffir beer.

The world was at war but Sophiatown went on just the same. And yet not exactly the same . . . times were more difficult. Food was dearer and the people had no change from what they earned. Many young men had gone to fight for the King of England. That was what he would do if he were younger.

The streets reeked with smells but he had no sense of smell. Children played in the filthy streets. He saw the same old dogs running down the streets in packs. Smoke rose from the braziers in the streets. There were no fireplaces in the houses.

It suddenly occurred to Nic that he would go into the church. It was a big wooden building, spacious and quiet. Not a soul was there. Nic was a nominal Christian, but when he went to church he went really for the singing. It was grand to hear the hymns sung all at once in half-a-dozen native languages.

He walked up to the altar and stared at the crucifix. He knew the story about the Man who had died to save the world, but lately he had listened to some of the men talking about the white man's god who did not seem to care at all for the black man. But now he

knew that he had come to ask the God of the White Man to look after Basie. Sounds of life and laughter came through the open door. There was a mighty peace in the church. He fell to his knees and prayed in Sesutu.

"You know, God," he said, "my Basie has gone to fight for the King of England. You know how good he is and how much I love him. He is straight like an arrow, like a young tree he is. The missus is breaking her heart. She scolds a lot you know, but she's a good missus. Now the master is a very good master and he's sad too because Basie has gone into danger. And my heart is very sore. You got to watch him because he's too full of courage and perhaps he won't see the danger. Let him shoot straight, O Lord. Let him kill the enemies of the King. That is all."

He went out and felt better.

Walking down the street he heard his name called. He turned to find his old friend Sam coming out of a backyard. Sam was a little older and wore a scraggy beard. His clothes were patched.

"Nic," said Sam, "how are you? Where are you going? It's a working day and here you are dressed in your best. Don't tell me you have given up that good job."

Nic laughed. "No, I'm not likely to do that, Sam. You see, Basie has gone to the war and my heart is very sore, and I just could not go back to work to-day."

"Waw," said Sam, "I know what you mean. You love Basie."

"He's the light of my eyes, Sam." Then he smiled. "But he's brave, Basie is, and I've been to church and prayed for him. He will come home."

There was a suggestion of a question in the last sentence. Sam stroked his chin. "Many will be killed in this war," he said. "Thousands of people, Nic."

Nic nodded. "I asked God to turn the bullets from Basie," he said. "He can do that can't he?"

Sam's brow wrinkled in thought. "Maybe, son. But I'll tell you something. There's a great witch-doctor come here from the Double Mountains of Basutoland. You remember, we herded sheep in sight of those mountains. You should see this great witch-doctor."

Nic grasped Sam's hand. "Where is he?" he said.

"Down the street, but he's as busy as flies in summer-time. Come on."

Nicodemus was shepherded into a backyard where there was a crowd of people consulting the medicine-man. They stood in a queue for a long time. When their turn came they walked into a room where an old man was sitting on the earthen floor. He was as old as the mountains, Nic thought. His hair was white like snow, his mouth gap-toothed, his eyes rheumy and his voice quavering.

"Friends," he said, "what troubles you?"

"It's Nicodemus," said Sam. "His Basie has gone to the war."

"I know," said the witch-doctor, "he who was in the big university

on the hill, he who threw his books away and took up a gun, he who is fair-haired and blue-eyed with an open face." The old man's eyes were closed. "And I see beside him a little brown-haired girl with skin like a peach. They are well-mated."

And Nicodemus marvelled.

The old man opened his eyes. He picked up a bag made out of the skin of a bush rat, delved into it with a long skinny hand and drew out the bones. There were two seashells, bones of a tortoise and of a lion, the knuckle bones of jackals, smooth stones from the belly of a crocodile and bones from the legs of baboons. There were tiny bones which looked like the finger bones of a man. He made passes in the air. He scattered the bones on the little straw mat between his legs. He talked to the bones in a strange language. He drew a ten-shilling note from his trousers pocket and placed it among the bones.

"The money is lonely," he said.

And Nicodemus took a ten shilling note from his pocket and placed it near the note.

"That is good," said the witch-doctor. He fingered the bones. And he said: "He who is straight as an arrow will live but he won't come back as he went away. But he will live."

"What do you mean?" gasped Nicodemus.

"His mind will be hurt but it will mend," said the witch-doctor.

Nicodemus's heart danced. He would not worry any more. He had made it safe for Hugh. He thanked the old man and felt that the ten shillings were well spent.

When they returned to the street Nic said: "Sam, my friend, I am so happy that a terrible thirst has come upon me. I long for the drink of my people, the drink that brings songs to the lips and sleep to the tired bones. Sure old Maria still brews the best kaffir beer in all Sophiatown."

"Waw," said Sam. "I, too, am as thirsty as a dried river in summer."

They found Maria, fat as butter and with a face like a moon, in her backyard. They tasted her brew and called her the Mother of Kaffir Beer. Nic sent Sam off with pennies for the picannins who were on sentry duty in the street. They would give the alarm if the police came raiding and then the beer would be poured down the drain. But those picannins were smart. They could smell the police from a long way off.

Nicodemus was getting merry now. He had no worries in the world. He had taken no chances and now Hugh would be all right. He drank to Hugh. He remembered through the haze of his mind the beer drinks in the kraal, the dancing of the maidens under the big moon, an ox roasting on the open fire. There were times when he wanted to go back and never return to the big, bustling city again, but he never went because he wanted to see Basie every day. His heart was crying now for the mountains.

Sam said to Nicodemus: "Some day we'll go home and never come back surely. When I'm dead I want to be buried sitting up in the old Basuto way, and my family must kill an ox and have a feast and a big beer drink else my soul will not rest in peace. Ah, what will become of me if I die here and there will be no one to put grains of maize and millet in my grave and no one to put the assegai in my dead hand?" Big tears welled in his eyes.

"Don't cry, Sam," said Nicodemus, "Men don't cry. I'll see to it that you'll be buried the way you want." Sam brushed his tears away.

Nicodemus peered at a woman who had just come in from the street. She wore the long skirt of the Basuto woman. She was in her fifties. Suddenly he recognised her. He staggered to his feet. "Why, if it isn't Mary Polana," he said.

"Old Nic," said Mary and her mouth opened in a wide smile. They shook hands. "I haven't seen you for years, since you worked next door. How's your husband?" said Nic.

"He's dead, Nic."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Have a drink with me Mary."

Mary gulped a mug of beer. "Fill it again," said Nic. And Mary drank her second mug more slowly.

"Where you working now, Mary?" She told him.

"Waw," he said, "Sam'll tell you I'm drunk but don't you believe him. I'll show you I'm dead sober. My Basie's sweetheart lives in the house where you work."

Nicodemus described Elsebe. "God's hand is in it all," he said. "I'll come and see you. I have much to tell you. Nothing must harm the little girl because when Basie comes home she must be well. See?"

"Yes," said Mary. And then she said that she had seen the tall handsome soldier, and that she knew the men of the house were against the war. But she was just as sure, she said, that the hearts of her missus and the meisie were purer than gold.

Mary left Nic and Sam drinking. When she reached home she found Elsebe alone. She said at once, speaking in Afrikaans. "A strange thing happened to-day. I ran into an old friend, Nicodemus, and he knows you."

Elsebe smiled. "Yes, he's a dear old fellow."

"He is the brother of a chief, although not a big chief, in Basutoland. He told me about your soldier. I'll not say a word to the men," she said significantly.

Mary had her ears open always. She knew what was happening in the house. She knew that the old missus was very worried.

"Nicodemus is coming to see me," she said.

"Yes, he can come."

"He says I should ask you sometimes how Basie is when you have a letter."

"All right, Mary."

Mary was solemn. "If there's trouble, Meisie, you can depend on me." Then she went to her room.

In one day two native people had offered to help her. She understood now what it meant. Magda had seen it immediately.

In the backyard Nicodemus slept, with his uncles and his aunts, his cousins and the picannins. Each of the two rooms were crowded to suffocation. He continued drinking and when all his money was spent made ready to go home.

On the way he remembered when Basie had his first tooth, his first steps, climbing the first tree, the years of laughter ran through his heart like a river through a valley. His heart was given to a child, and then to a boy, and then to a man, and it belonged to him who had gone to fight some heathens.

When he got home his master demanded: "Where have you been Nicodemus?"

"I got drunk."

Philip Wayne voiced his surprise: "You seem to be speaking the truth."

"I never tell lies, master."

"But why did you get drunk?"

Nicodemus looked up. "My heart was sore," he said, "because Basie had gone away. First thing I did in Sophiatown I went to the church an' asked God to look after Basie. Then I went to a witch-doctor and he said that Basie would come home. I was so miserable an' so happy that Nicodemus got drunk."

"Well, all right Nic," said his master.

The little old gardener had expected a scolding. He scratched his head—it was still sore. He would have to tell old Sam all about it. He would always speak the truth, he decided, because then nothing happened.

CHAPTER IX

THROUGH the rolling veld of the Transvaal and into the tree-clad hills in the north of the Province and beyond the meandering Limpopo into the Rhodesias the Springbok convoy ate up the miles on the dust-laden roads. It was a long line of dull green transport wagons and armoured cars. Natives called to the Springboks from wayside kraals and the people in the little Rhodesian towns cheered them on their way. They laughed and called back that they would bring Abyssinia home in their haversacks.

They camped by night by the edge of forests or in the wide, whispering bush. They heard the hyena laugh and the lion roar. They shot wild game for the pot and ate venison washed down with bottles of beer. The lusty young men sang by the camp-fires, mingling English and Afrikaans songs.

The convoy bounced on narrow tracks where never a car had been driven. And they came into the land of Kenya where the

farms were rich. They left the green uplands and halted on the edge of a desert and there were trackless wastes of black lava rock running all the way into Abyssinia. There they joined the Springboks who had gone before them, the East Africans, the Rhodesians, and there were men of the King's African Rifles black as the night and armed like the Europeans with guns and bayonets, machine and Bren-guns and trench mortars. And there were natives from the Gold Coast, blacker than the East African negroes, and they were soldiers to the last inch of their giant stature. The little armies mustered on the scorching red frontier sands ready to lay siege to the immense fortress of Abyssinia and a garrison of 250,000 Italians.

In the cooler nights there were long talks, and it had to happen one night that an Afrikaner soldier questioned the right of black men to have arms.

Michael said quietly: "The Italians use the Banda. We'll be meeting them soon and I'm told they're tough fellows. I'll be very glad if the Gold Coast natives come to our aid if we get into a jam. In any case, courage knows no colour."

Hugh agreed but Dirk was puzzled.

One day a small band of Springboks were sent out on a scouting expedition. They were to watch the movements of some wandering Banda. Native soldiers were also sent out with the scouts. Hugh watched them. The negroes knew all there was to know about bush-craft. They slithered like snakes.

It was his first sight of the Banda. He was lying on a hill and the stones were so hot that they blistered his knees. The Banda troop was moving through a dried valley. They were silent-footed, half naked, wearing trousers and carrying bandoliers and rifles.

He could see the criss-cross of the goat tracks. The country was as inhospitable as a miser. Hugh got a perfect sight on one of the Banda. The man tumbled as his rifle spoke. A cold sweat pricked Hugh's face. He had shot his first man, now a crumpled lump on the black lava.

Shots spluttered around him. He lay flat and heard someone crawling towards him. It was Michael.

"It hurt me to kill, Michael," said Hugh.

"I know," said Michael.

From behind the rocks guns spoke. And the great Rift Valley echoed with the whine of death. In the evening the Banda fled dragging their wounded with them.

On the old slave-trading paths black men died suddenly, slaves to a war machine in which they were merely hired soldiers.

The Springboks raided like the old Boers before them. Guns rolled up from Kenya and there were tanks and more armoured cars. The big attack, the men said, would come any day. But day followed day and week followed week and there was nothing to do except carry out manœuvres or go raiding, shooting Banda as you would shoot buck.

Newspapers came from the world they knew, and there were references to bombings on the Reef. The men were angry . . . they said that the dynamitards should be caught and shot. The newspapers passed from hand to hand until they were tattered. Hitler was sprawling across Europe and Britain was fighting the blitz.

The Springboks were restless. Dirk sometimes dreamed with his eyes wide open about the Golden Gate.

On the Rand the days ran into summer and after a broiling day thunder-clouds often gathered and the rain tumbled. The sunsets were wild. The earth was always thirsty and drank up the rain. Elsebe was in the middle of her finals for the B.A. degree and she sat over her books late into the night. And late in the night always Carl would come home.

Bombings on the Rand and on the Reef were common. Martha soon saw that Piet was unhappy in whatever he did. He was trying to break out from the toils which held him. She knew that Carl would flare up if she questioned him, so she kept a quiet tongue and ministered to his needs with utter devotion.

She read Carl's articles in *Die Brand*. One day she read : "The Boer nation is like a giant tied with ropes, a giant who has been sleeping for a century during which time he has been trampled on by everybody. Now the giant is awakening and breaking the ropes."

Piet became terribly afraid when Carl was made a general in the inner secret circle. At first he had been amazed at the change in his son . . . the student had become a soldier. He had accompanied him one night to a farm in the Pretoria district. It lay in a cup of land with koppies all around. There was a full moon.

Men mustered in the valley and drilled in the night. There were sentries posted on the koppies . . . and Piet was glad to be a mere sentry. The krantzes echoed to military commands and he heard the voice of his son, clear and resonant on the night air. The drill instructions had been taken out of a book stolen from the South African Military College. And when it was over the men cooked chops and sausages on wood fires near the farm . . . and then they paraded into the yard of the homestead. Over the open doorway hung a big photograph of Adolf Hitler. Every man gave the Nazi salute.

One night Piet said that he was unwell and Carl went off alone. When he came home he showed his father his uniform and told him that the rebels had secured plans of some of the military camps.

It was a warm night. They took deck-chairs and sat at the far end of the garden under the gums. The night was full of the chirrup of crickets and the zing of the cicadas. The sky was rifted with scarves of cloud. Carl smoked incessantly and Piet sucked at his pipe. He did not know how to begin but he had to warn his son now. He was afraid for himself but he feared much more for Carl. He worshipped the boy and he knew that he was already in danger.

Some men had been arrested, and the newspapers were talking about a big coup in which the police would round up the saboteurs. The police, it was stated, knew about the secret drilling by night on the veld. The people were also clamouring for action against the subversive elements.

Piet coughed and said: "You have to be careful, Carl."

Carl looked at his father through a cloud of smoke. The smoke drifted away and Piet saw the anger on his son's face.

"I thought you were getting faint-hearted," he said bitterly.

"Not faint-hearted Carl, but what if the police came upon you when you were drilling the men?"

"We'd shoot," Carl said. "What's the use of getting worried over what might happen? I'm going all out for the victory of our cause. Nothing will deter me." His voice was tense. "I've seen you wavering. I've seen the doubts in Mama and in Elsebe. I know you haven't talked yet . . . but listen, you remember the oath, you remember that the price for breaking that oath is death." He laughed harshly. "What if the secret council asked me to kill you?"

"You wouldn't do that?"

"No, I suppose I couldn't." He got to his feet and stood looking down on his father. "You are white-livered. We don't want that type in the army of liberation."

Piet started. The challenge hurt him. "I'm not that," he said, "I'm worried about you."

"Keep your worries. I can look after myself. The cause is my religion now. You're a coward."

Piet was stung. He jumped up. "I'm not a coward," he shouted. "You misunderstand, you always will. You are my very life and that's why I'm afraid."

"My life is my own," Carl countered, "and I'll do with it just what I will."

Their voices had become high. Martha ran out into the garden. The men stood facing one another in open quarrel.

"What's the matter?" she said. Piet slumped into his chair.

"Get a chair for your mother, Carl," he said.

Carl walked to the stoep and brought another chair. "Sit down Mama," he said, "Papa wants to talk."

And Piet talked. He told the whole story. Carl listened sullenly and Martha listened with fear gripping her heart. When Piet had finished she said: "I thought such things were happening, but I didn't want to upbraid or to challenge."

She sensed the loveliness and the peace of the night and the garden was full of fragrance, but she felt as if she were waiting at a death-bed.

"Tell us, Carl, what you think," she said. "It's no use being angry or bitter with your father or with me."

He saw his restless fingers as he took out another cigarette. She waited and Piet waited, and his pipe was dead cold in his hand.

Carl lit his cigarette. He flicked off its ash with nervous fingers. He cleared his throat and said: "I know how you feel."

Martha's heart missed a beat. She had expected him to rail. Carl went on: "I am tied to my destiny, and the love we have for each other cannot save me from that. I believe that the Afrikaner must dominate the Englishman. This is our country, we bled and suffered for it before the Englishman came. We trekked away from his bitter laws in the Cape and we crossed the Vaal, but the damned Englishman followed us to steal the gold of the Rand. Yes, I am bitter. I shall always be bitter until my people rule."

His voice was passionate but quiet, and Martha read his determination. "Go on," she said.

"I believe that I am ready to die for the ideals of my people, and nothing you can do will alter that."

She stared at him, her lovely Carl. She knew how wayward he was, that hate had blinded him, and that he would sacrifice himself on a worthless altar. She knew that he worshipped the things that did not matter . . . to her the simple things mattered . . . peace and good will.

She said: "Do you think that those things are worth dying for? I didn't know that bringing terror to the people by bombing was a noble way to achieve one's purpose." She had decided that subterfuge was not the way to an understanding.

Carl got to his feet. "Mama," he said, "you live in your quiet way and know little about the world. I am going to smash this order. You talk of bombing. Will you tell the police that your son Carl is one of the minds behind the bombings?"

There was a sneer in his voice. She put a hand to her eyes.

"I must hurt you to make you understand," he shouted. "It is my life, and with my life I'll do what I will."

Piet had been silent all this time. Anger welled in him. He knew now that he loved Martha even more than he loved Carl, that there was in his heart a growing resentment against the arrogance of Carl.

He said, suddenly, "You have made your choice. Please be decent enough to stop hurting your mother."

"Wait," said Carl, and he walked away to his room. Martha and Piet sat in silence.

Elsebe came up the path. She paused to stare on the glory of the jacaranda in blossom. Its blue, bell-like clusters of flowers were lit up by the light from one of the small windows.

She walked into the house and stopped. Carl was standing in the doorway of the lounge in uniform, a tunic, riding breeches, a Sam Browne belt, brown boots and spurs. On the sleeve of the tunic was a blue armlet with a white circle and in the centre of the circle was a red swastika.

He turned at her step and smiled arrogantly when he saw the surprise on her face.

"Carl," she said, "have you gone mad?"

"No," he said, "I'm going to fight for my principles."

She went up to him. "You fool, you clumsy fool. I suppose it means nothing to you that mother will break her heart?"

He turned away from her. He called: "Come here, Mama and Papa." They hurried to the house. He stood in the middle of the room. There was a long terrible silence, and Carl grew uneasy watching the eyes of his mother. His own fell to his boots.

"I'll go away," he said with his eyes still lowered.

"Go, Carl," said his mother. "Let us know where you are please. We love you so much."

Without a word he turned away. They heard him packing his bags. They heard him taking out his car. Elsebe ran out. As he turned the car in the drive she stood in front of it and he was compelled to stop. He leaned out of the driving seat. "I'm in a hurry," he said.

She crossed over to him. "I hope, Carl," she said softly, "that you'll never be hurt as you hurt Mama to-night."

She saw a thread of pain running across his face but he wiped it out quickly.

"When it's all over you will see how right I was, Sis."

"You've grown hard and arrogant," she said. "You were so much better when I knew you as a poet, when you captured the music of the veld and the traditions of our people."

"I write sterner stuff now," he said.

"But it's your poetry that will be remembered and not aping the Nazi, running into God knows what."

He put in the clutch and the engine spat. He drove off into the night.

When she got back to the house her father and mother were sitting in the garden. She took the chair where Carl had sat.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Some day he'll come back," said Martha, "for his ways are now not the ways the Lord meant him to walk. He will be hurt to his very soul."

Elsebe left them for she felt that they had much to talk over.

They sat close together and Piet took Martha's hand in his and there were tears in his voice.

"I've been wrong," he said. "I encouraged him as a boy to think of nothing except race, of the traditions of our people and the Great Trek."

Her voice was calm as she replied: "They were good things, Piet."

They talked of Carl as a child, clutching at the best of memories, and Martha whispered his first poem, and they smiled, remembering.

But fear returned to Piet. "I'm afraid for him, Martha," he said.

"So am I, but we can only pray and wait. Hate burns itself out or else it burns the hater."

Then she told him about Elsebe and Hugh Wayne. A few weeks ago he would have been angry.

"It is the only way," said Martha. "The Boer and the Briton must get together in love, just as Elsebe loves the soldier in Abyssinia, fighting because he believes he is fighting for the real things. Carl, too, thinks that he is fighting for a new world . . . but I would prefer him to fight in the open like a soldier."

"It is well," said Piet, "that Carl does not know that Elsebe loves a soldier of Jan Smuts. He would hate her for that."

The crickets were mating in the warm night. The stars were alive. Martha and Piet sat hunched with their own sorrow.

CHAPTER X

PHILIP WAYNE had become one of the outstanding advocates of the Transvaal Bar because he had never allowed anything to come between him and his career. It was often said that he would be a judge before he was forty-five. He was now forty-two. His friends at the Gold Club noticed he was not the jovial fellow of the pre-war years. He was not at the Club as often as he used to be. He talked much less.

One day he was sitting in the Club thinking of his son in the sweltering heat of the Abyssinian border when he was hailed by one of his acquaintances, Richard Jerold, a mine magnate. Jerold was big, fat and florid.

"Wayne," he said gruffly, "you look unhappy."

"I am," said Philip, "I'm thinking of a valley where the black lava is as hot as hell."

Jerold guffawed. "And where in hell's name might that be?"

"On the borders of Abyssinia."

"Oh," said Jerold, "why can't people stop thinking of the damn war. I'm more concerned about the state of the market, and it's damn bad, and I'm afraid we'll have to reduce our production of gold, and that will make this country a black lava belt all right. Have a drink, Wayne."

"No thank you," said Philip. His mouth hardened. "Yes I will," he added, "a whisky and soda."

"And I'll have a brandy. Let's drink and be merry."

They sipped their drinks and Philip said: "You know, Jerold, you said an extraordinary thing just now."

"What about?"

"About the market and the production of gold when Europe is under the heel of Hitler and England is fighting alone for her life."

Jerold's face reddened. "That's what every one of my pals is saying."

"Every one of your pals," said Philip. "Don't you know, don't they know, that millions of people are starving . . . and you and

they still talk about gold. My son is in the war—he's my only son, and his life is worth more to me than all the gold of the Rand."

Jerold looked awkward and for a moment his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. "I understand now, old man," he said. "I have no sons. But what I meant to say was that this Hitler is a nuisance coming as he did to upset the peace of the world and the prosperity in which we were living."

"What if it all went, Jerold? Just went and there wasn't another ounce of gold?"

Jerold looked as though he had been struck hard on the mouth. "That can't happen," he said.

Philip was like a cat with a mouse, like the advocate he was with a witness in the box, a witness he did not like.

"What if Hitler comes rolling down through Africa? All our golden dreams wouldn't stop him. The war machine and flesh and blood will . . . but our machine is only beginning to turn, and our armies are small. By the way, you know that Hitler is fighting without gold?"

"Yes, but he made slaves of his people." Jerold seemed to be clutching at straws.

"And those slaves have now mastered most of Europe. And here we still think in terms of gold and dividends and of the share market . . . and London has burned and cities have been razed to the ground and hell is wandering the villages of France and the harvests have rotted on their stalks and children have been orphaned. Every night over England the bombers come and the bombs whistle a hell song as they drop, and people are living like moles in the bowels of the earth. And here . . ." his voice was full of sarcasm, "we send down day by day tens of thousands of men to dig gold, because gold is the god we know." He got up. "That's all, Jerold. It's a pity you have no son."

Jerold looked after him. He was thunderstruck.

In the summer nights Philip went walking after dinner. The gardens were radiant after the rains. He went one night to a meeting of the Civil Protection Service, where a warden, a little man, was telling the sector and street wardens about the terror of bombing. The man had been through two wars.

"Gawd 'elp us," he said, "if we 'as to wake up one night an' find we 'as to fight fires like they does in London. Them bombers fly long distances. If a shower of incineraries, say, fell in the 'east of Jo'burg there'd be an 'ell of a fire."

"And it 'ud burn out a lot of rubbish, too," said a fat woman.

There was a burst of laughter.

"That's all right, lidy," he said when he had wiped the smile off his face, "but a feller in a 'plane up there," and his eyes swept the ceiling, "just drops 'em and then he's off from the hanti-aircraft guns."

"Where are they?" several asked at once.

"Now yer've got me," said the little warden. "I'm told there isn't one hanti-aircraft weapon in the 'ole of Jo'burg."

They were all trying their best, Philip Wayne thought, as he walked from the little suburban hall. He looked up at the clear sky. He heard the drone of an aeroplane above the city. What if hundreds should come one night? He visualised what might happen, Johannesburg burning, fire running up its koppies. Would the people then realise that gold did not matter?

He tried to be honest with himself. He felt like some of the European countries just before they fell. They had called on God when the enemy was at the gates, offering God everything they possessed, the wealth which they valued most, their contrite hearts which had not been contrite until then. But it was too late . . . the vandals had swept through. He was thinking for the thousandth time . . . what if my Hugh is killed? Then everything would topple round my ears, all my dreams would turn to ashes, all my hopes would be dead. Everything I have would be worthless. Yes, he, too, was the miser on his knees offering God everything.

He realised that for years he had never thought consciously of God. He had gone sometimes to the Cathedral. He had gone on his knees, but his prayers had been parrot prayers. He had not known God. He knew that had Hugh not gone to the war he would not be thinking of God now. His prayers now were selfish, but for once as an advocate he was sincere. He knew that justice was not square. He was conscious of many things he could do in South Africa with its many problems. He knew from his experience at the Bar a great deal about its seamy side, about the wretched poverty of tens of thousands of the people, especially the black people. He had already put one thing right . . . a tenth of his income was going to charities.

He had drawn closer to Joan. After all he had done much to spoil her, lavishing on her all the things that she wanted. He was proud and his wife, he had decided, must be a proud woman. Now he was seeing through it all . . . their pride was snobbery.

Michael Weiner had impressed him. Too many Jews at the Bar, too many Jewish doctors, dentists, teachers, too many in business . . . his friends were always talking about them. He himself had almost come to think like this, against his better judgment, merely because of an inherent prejudice that every refugee from the toils of Hitlerism came to his country without two pennies to rub together and were able to run about in expensive cars and buy mansions in Parktown and Houghton after a couple of years.

He saw now that to Hitler every race other than German was a slave race. He often thought of Michael, in fact Hugh would never let him forget . . . he was always talking in his letters about Michael and also about Dirk.

Gradually he was trying to tell Joan of the revolution in his heart, of the prejudices scaling off his mind, of his hopes for the

future. The war was on his own hearth. It was so empty without the laughing face of their son.

But there had been a night when he nearly got angry. Joan had said: "I expect by now Hugh has forgotten that little Afrikaner girl . . . I forget her name."

He wanted to say that it did not matter if Hugh had not forgotten, but he only said: "Maybe."

He had never had any loud prejudices against the Afrikaners, but even he had been too proud, and that was common among the English in South Africa. He put himself into his son's shoes . . . Hugh was fighting alongside the sons of Boers.

On that night when Joan had mentioned the Afrikaner girl, events were moving to bring Elsebe to see Philip.

That day Nicodemus was working in his garden when Joseph the Zulu called him. "You old Basuto jackal," he said in kitchen kaffir, "somebody's calling you on the 'phone and it's the voice of a woman. Waw, you old dog you."

"And you Zulu hyena," said Nicodemus, "why shouldn't a woman call me on the 'phone?"

Nicodemus handled the telephone receiver gingerly. It was Mary calling him. The house shook with his voice and her high-pitched voice seemed to be shrieking through the 'phone. The Zulu stood in the doorway with a wide grin on his polished face. Nicodemus was very solemn as he put down the receiver.

"She's jilted you," said the Zulu.

Nicodemus frowned. "Trouble," he said. "A lot of trouble." He walked away mumbling.

He went half way to meet Mary that night, walking down Empire Road where the poplars wore their crowns of leaves. He met Mary at the appointed place and they sat away from the road in an empty plot on green grass. She began her story at once and she spoke Sesutu, and like every native she was eloquent in her own tongue.

"The little meisie Elsebe, her heart is sore and she walks with trouble in her eyes," said Mary. "Baas Carl has gone away. I saw his uniform and I know he is following that terrible man, Hitler, who has brought all the trouble on the world."

"Waw," said Nicodemus, "and did she tell you of her trouble?"

"No, but I heard the quarrel and I saw Baas Carl dressed up like a fighting cock. And the old missus is walking in a dream."

Nicodemus tore at a tuft of grass. "And there's my Basie fighting a thousand miles away, fighting against that cruel man Hitler, and the son of your house doing things like that." He spat and then added: "These damn Dutch."

"But it's the little meisie Elsebe we are worried about Nic."

"Um," he said, "a rare flower she is for my Basie to have fallen in love with her. I told her to call me if she was in trouble, but of course she wouldn't come to a poor old black man like me."

"I have come instead," said Mary.

"And with not an idea in your head," he said.

Mary's voice rasped: "If that's the way you talk . . ."

"No, no," he said quickly. "Let me think."

They were silent for a time. Native cyclists passed on the road, calling to each other, their voices full of laughter.

"They're Basutos," said Nic, "just look at them and listen to them. They once rode horses like the wind. Now they ride machines."

Mary said nothing.

Nic said: "If the little meisie's brother wants to drown we can't stop him." Then suddenly he jumped to his feet. "I've got it," he said. He sat down abruptly.

"What?" asked Mary.

Nic spoke slowly as if relishing his thoughts. "There's Basie's father. Now he's the greatest man of the law in the country. You should see his books reaching all round one room from the floor to the ceiling. He knows everything, and I've noticed he's thoughtful and kinder lately. I'm sure he is thinking all the time of Basie. Now Basie loves Elsebe and he wouldn't like her to be worried would he?"

Mary shook her head vigorously. "Come on," she said, "you are as slow as an old ox."

"And you," said Nicodemus, "you are as inquisitive as an old cow. But wait. This is what I propose and it's good. Let Elsebe go to Basie's father and tell him all her troubles and it won't cost her a penny. He charges a mountain of money for his advice I know, because if he didn't he wouldn't be so rich. And that reminds me, I'll have to ask him for more wages." He laughed quietly.

"It's good," said Mary. "Only a wise man can unravel this tangle. I thought you'd suggest going to the witch-doctor in Sophiatown, but that would cost money and we have no money."

"We never have," said Nic. "The white folk ride on our backs and they pay us miserable wages. We do all the dirty work. Look at me, my back is bending with toiling in the rich man's garden, but I forget all my grievances because I love Basie."

"And I've ironed and washed so long that all the clothes I have washed would stretch from Jo'burg to the kraal of my people in the Basuto hills, if there was a line that could stretch so far," said Mary. "And it's the same with me. When you have seen a little meisie grow, when you have done so much for a white child as I have done for her, then it's the heart that speaks, Nicodemus."

"That is so, Mary," said the old gardener. "Will you tell the little meisie how I have spoken?"

"I will tell," said Mary.

"She must go to the big baas's office in the town, down in the street that is called Rissik beyond the Town Hall. She'll find out where it is."

They lingered and talked of other things. They had finished

with the problem. They talked of the hills of home, of the kraals and the beehive-shaped huts, of the beer drinks and the laughter swelling up to the hills.

"I sometimes wonder why we stay in the city," said Nic.

"Because the old life has stopped," said Mary. "Here we earn much more. That's why we work for the Englishman and the Dutch, working for the missuses who scold, although I must say that the little meisie's mother is very kind to me."

"In a field of mealies even after the locusts have been through it you will find a few good cobs," said Nicodemus.

"Meaning that there are some good Dutch people," said Mary.

"Meaning just that," said Nicodemus. "Strange it is how they have never forgiven us because our fathers fought them for the land, the land that belonged to our fathers. The white folk are now fighting for their lands, and that is the brave way."

When Mary gave Elsebe her breakfast on the following morning she told her that she had called in the aid of Nicodemus and what Nicodemus had said.

"He may talk out of his turn," said Elsebe with panic in her voice.

"No," said Mary, "he will not. You go to Basie's father, the wise man of the law. Nicodemus will keep the secret of our trouble like the rock keeps the echo."

Elsebe was now teaching in a school in the slum suburb of Fordsburg. It was a Wednesday and afternoon closing for the shops. Magda would be free. She arranged to meet her at the Municipal Library. The school finished at two o'clock.

They sat on a seat beside the pocket-handkerchief gardens. The grass as always was shaven and the plots were blazing with flowers. Elsebe told the whole story.

Magda said: "Carl is running into danger. Hugh's father will keep a confidence even though his conscience will be worried. I don't know how he can help. If Carl were arrested and we needed a lawyer to defend him then we would try to get the best lawyer and Mr. Wayne is a great lawyer I understand. But I know the evils of Nazidom and I'd go a long way to pull a young man out of the dunghill. Let's go."

Elsebe agreed. They found it easy to get an interview with Philip Wayne. He sat behind his big desk and leaned back in his swivel chair. His keen blue eyes seemed to swallow up Elsebe. She was flushed and afraid. She was like a flower, he thought.

He glanced swiftly at Magda and measured her exotic beauty. He had not seen the girls since Hugh had left that day on the station.

"I am honoured," he said. "Do you often hear from Hugh, Elsebe?"

"Very often," she said.

"And how is Michael, Mrs. Weiner?"

"Well," said Magda. "I'd better explain our visit. Elsebe has a problem on her mind, a big problem, and we bring it to you because you are a man of the world and a brilliant lawyer."

He smiled. "I wonder," he said. "Well, Elsebe, what is it?"

She fumbled for words and looked appealingly at Magda. Magda said: "You see, Elsebe is tongue-tied. I'd better tell you." And she told him what she knew. The story was fresh in her memory.

As he listened Philip's face changed. His eyes grew angry. And then he looked at Elsebe and his face softened. The telephone rang twice and the second time he rang through to his secretary saying that he could take no more calls until his interview was over.

Elsebe spoke then. Her fears had vanished. "My brother is not evil, you see. His passions are carrying him away. My mother is breaking her heart."

"What can I do?" he asked. "Your brother seems to be determined to sacrifice himself for a mirage, that is if Hitler can't win this war. It is a serious crime to be a leader of the saboteurs. I am supposed to be a worthy citizen, and now you have given me a secret to worry me. You catch me between two stones. But I understand, I do understand. I shall do what I can, think it out somehow. I shall act."

Elsebe felt that a burden had fallen from her. She had shared her worry and her sorrow.

That evening when Philip was walking up his drive, Nicodemus lifted his head from a flower bed he was weeding.

"Baas," he said, "please save that fool of a brother of Basic's girl."

Philip stopped. "What on earth do you know about it?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Nic.

The old gardener bent again to his task and Philip Wayne walked on slowly. But what could he do about the whole wretched affair?

CHAPTER XI

THE Springboks marched into Abyssinia in the blistering January days when the light on the pitch-black lava blinded the eyes, and the wings of the fighting planes and even the mudguards of the armoured cars were too hot to touch.

They came hurtling into the little mud-walled forts across the old tracks made by camel caravans in the dead ages. They found waterholes and slaked their thirst and they drove the Italians and the Banda back into the pitiless waste to die of thirst.

Black men and white men tore out roads through the bush, moving rocks to make tracks for the war machine. The Springboks swooped down in the dead of night and the forts fell.

Through desert and bush, across the Juba River, and they captured the little white towns by the blue sea. Only a few men

had been killed in many weeks' fighting. But from the blue sea the vast hinterland rolled across the plains into the blue mountains. The Springboks were on their way to a fort in the foothills.

In the mountains they said there would be water and trees and they wanted to forge through hell to heaven.

Hugh and his comrades had slept on the sands of the desert. They had sweated. They had fought sometimes when they were dying for sleep. Now the rains came. The Springboks were drenched. They slept in their wet clothes. They shivered. They dried their wet clothes with the heat of their bodies. They ate sparingly. Tempers were short.

Dead men on the trail . . . fighting against time. There was only time to eat biscuit, to swallow meat, to drink the precious muddy water, to cover the miles . . . there was little time to talk.

The fort was hidden in the mists of the mountains, and the rains fell. The tracks were deep in slime. The rivers ran. The trucks got stuck. Men became beasts of burden, pushing, shoving, breaking their backs, pushing on by inches. Mud instead of sand . . . it was the same to them. Get going, going. What if your brain snaps? You haven't a brain, you are a fighting machine. You are going to storm that fort on the hills. Some of you will die. But what of that? You have seen dead men tumbling, you have seen men on their knees crying for mercy, and you were merciful when you had the time. You have seen black men shoot as straight as you can, but what of that? You have forged through a hot hell and you have only got to the gates. Haven't you crossed the bloody blistering desert? You have no individuality any more. You are in a team and it's a scrum all the way.

Bewildering thoughts worried the short sleeping of Hugh and of Michael. Dirk was as silent and as strong as a rock. They lay close together in the pouring rain, and they cursed together and laughed sometimes. They were tired to death, but they could not rest. The bitter cold came with the rains and the men's teeth chattered. The bush country swept into little hills and into higher hills, and the tracks were steep where only goats and herds had trodden before. The men had to drag their heavy support weapons with them up the hills.

The mists hid the advancing troops . . . they came like shadows through the rain-soaked land, they came silently. They trekked for two days, the modern Voortrekkers, and they rested the night.

Not a fire was lit, not a cigarette was smoked. There was another day's trek, the last before the assault. They lay down under the trees and bushes.

Michael was near Hugh and he said: "I am tired to death."

"And I," said Hugh.

And Dirk talked through the rain. "We'll take that damned mountain . . . but I wish the sun would shine, man."

"Will the sun ever shine again?" asked Hugh dreamily. And they

drifted into sleep with whispering voices all round them and the raindrops were loud.

They moved away before dawn and the rain still pelted. Thunder muttered. The torrents sang in the valleys and the white spray danced on the waters. The mists were so heavy that a man saw the next man as a shadow. Hugh whispered taking Michael's wet hand in his: "Good Luck." And Michael repeated the wish. And Dirk the giant came and thrust his big hands in theirs, and said: "If anything happens to me meeting you I'll be at the golden gate." And he laughed.

Rain was dripping from his cap and running down his nose, and he was smiling.

"You'd smile in hell," said Hugh. They stared together at the thick black clouds swathing the mountains. They climbed the slippery slopes and cursed under their breath. Their hands were torn as they grasped jutting rocks and their clothes were torn. They stared into the pall of mist and they listened, listened. Suddenly, from the foothills and the valleys the guns spoke, and the thunder was only a murmur in the mad sound of the guns. Curtains of bullets fell with the rain. Men dropped on their faces in the wet soil and against the rocks. Then they stumbled on, and the curtain of rain and mist was torn and voices were heard in the gaps between the shell bursts. Death came hurtling down from the hill.

The wild cries of the black soldiers as they charged and fell. A soldier crying out in Afrikaans for water. Hugh stopped for a moment and saw Bantu stretcher-bearers picking up the wounded. They were unarmed. They walked into the shot and the shell with set faces and only one purpose, to succour the wounded.

And then Hugh ran on . . . crouching now behind a rock, now leaping forward, now crawling. There was no time to think, he was crawling through hell. He saw shadows around him. His ears were blasted by the barrage. He did not know the mists were lifting until he saw the man near him clearly. And then he was up against the wall of the fort, and he saw Italians in a machine-gun nest. And then a shell came and before they could scream all the Italians were dead. Over the wall and there right in front of him was an Italian on his knees clutching a rosary in his trembling hands. The bayonet was about to be thrust through the man's body but Hugh saw his eyes and held the thrust. He kicked the man away and then he went mad. Everybody was mad. Men were squealing like pigs at the slaughter. Men were bayoneted and they died shrieking. The dead were lying about in piles. Blood ran in streams. Hugh was conscious of all the terror in the morning. He saw a man in front of him, and then the man was not there any more. He had just disappeared . . . bits of him were flying through the air.

Through his sweat-caked, mud-spattered eyes he saw a big white flag. He slumped to the ground and vomited. He lay on his back and tears streamed down his face. He lay there staring at the

ripping clouds, at a bit of blue in the heavens. He felt numb, sore. He heard his name called, and Dirk was kneeling beside him.

"Did the bastards get you, Hugh man?"

Hugh sat up. "No," he said. "It's all over isn't it?"

"All over Hugh man, hear them cheering." And Hugh heard thousands of throats bellowing. Hugh looked up and saw Michael. "Is he all right, Dirk?" asked Michael.

"As right as rain," said Dirk.

"Thank God," said Michael, and he slumped on his knees, and Hugh saw the pain at the back of his eyes. Dirk only saw a mud-spattered warrior.

"I vomited my guts up," said Hugh.

"I wanted to," said Michael.

"Let's get something to eat," said Dirk. "I'm as hungry as a lion."

"I couldn't eat a thing," said Hugh.

Dirk bounded to his feet and joined a group of Springboks who had rolled out a barrel of wine from a small inn in the centre of the square. He ran back to Michael and Hugh after he had had two drinks.

"Wine," he spluttered, "good bloody Italian wine. I'm going to get drunk."

"It's a good idea," said Michael.

"It's the only thing to do," said Hugh. Dirk rolled a barrel against the wall where Hugh and Michael were sitting. He broached the barrel, and Hugh emptied his water bottle and filled it with wine. He gulped a drink. The wine was sweet and he could feel it warming his belly. He took another drink and then looked around.

The place was a lunatic asylum. A group of Italians was in a corner of the street, unguarded. Their rifles and ammunition lay in a pile in the square. They watched the Springboks and they were sullen. Michael drunk deeply of his bottle and stared on the square.

The dead were being removed and it all looked as if it happened every day. Except for the murmur of voices there was a great silence in the hills, and the valleys were eating up the rays of the sun. English and Afrikaans voices mingled. Hugh stared on his fellows and said to Michael: "Here we are, English and Scots and Irish and Afrikaner, drinking the wine of victory."

"And a few German Jews," said Michael.

"You know," said Hugh, "I didn't know what I was doing. I was mad in the killing, and then when it was all over I spewed my guts out."

"I know," said Michael. "I was terribly afraid."

"I thought of you once," said Hugh, "and I was afraid."

Michael smiled. "I shan't be killed in Abyssinia," he said. "I am fighting Italians and I don't hate them. But I hate the Nazis. I shall not die until I have killed a few Nazis."

Dirk spluttered as he drank. "Why talk of dying Michael man? Who's going to die? We're going through to the end, and together we're going home when it's all over."

There was a sudden stir and then a silence. An Italian girl came into the square. She was young and slight, dark and with the eyes of a doe. Men stopped with their drinking bottles to their lips. A man cut a curse in half.

"My God," someone said, "a woman, a white woman."

She spat and walked away.

"Men who just now were maddened with the lust to kill behave like lambs before a slip of a girl," said Michael. "Hugh, what great stuff could be made of us, of these men."

Hugh said: "To-morrow we go on to do more killing, to drink more of victory, to drink the blood of our enemies. I knew it was going to be bitter, but not like this. I hate nobody, now. But to-morrow we shall go on and on."

Some of the men were singing lustily. Meat was being cooked on open fires in the square. Some of the men had raided the shops. Boots and clothing were scattered in the street. Here and there a man was chewing at a loaf of bread.

Dirk had fallen asleep. Looking at him Michael said: "He's a great soldier."

Hugh nodded. "He's a son of the earth and the salt of the earth."

The morning had passed like a nightmare, and now it was afternoon. The clouds were gone. Green country stretched down and down and then away to the foothills. And the evening came and a great singing burst from the square. Hugh and Michael sat apart and Dirk awakened and went off to quench his thirst. Old English melodies swept up into the stars, old Afrikander songs . . . all mixed, Scots and Irish too. And all through the songs ran the heartbreak of the exile.

Every South African, Boer and Briton, knows the song *Sarie Marais*. They sing it in the Afrikander tongue. It is the *Danny Boy* song of the veld, all the way from the Cape to the Limpopo . . . the song of a Boer soldier longing for his girl in the old Transvaal.

"When this is all over, Hugh," said Michael, "when all the hate has died down, and decency and sanity take the place of greed and indifference, when every man will be born free and get an equal opportunity, we shall look back on all this and perhaps see that our way to the building of the new world was through pain. The old world must go, it must."

Hugh sat up. "Yes," he said.

"The war did not come because of Hitler alone, he was the monster which the slime of the world threw up, and now we have to chain the monster, Hugh."

Hugh was about to take another drink, but Michael held his hand. "Don't," he said. "To-morrow you'll have the vilest headache. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Michael."

Dirk woke up suddenly. "What the hell are you two fellows talking about?" he said.

"About the new world after this massacre is over," said Hugh.

Dirk sat up. "It's only just begun, Hugh man."

"But afterwards, Dirk, what do you expect?" asked Michael.

Dirk's tongue had not been affected by the drink. "Fellows," he said, "when we go home you will come to my house, the little farm by the Golden Gate. A poor place it is, and the land is bloody rock. But when I was a boy I had my dreams—but hell, they was only dreams . . ." He paused and then added: "But the Golden Gate you must see, the Gate through the rocks."

"We'll come," said Hugh.

And Michael said: "Have you thought, Dirk, how we three, of different nationalities, can so easily be friends?"

Dirk shook his head. "No, man," he said.

"We are comrades in arms now," said Michael. "If one of us died the other two would be hurt, and hurt badly. Don't you see that we were meant to be like this?"

"I suppose so," said Dirk. "But what's bothering you Michael man?"

"I want this friendship to go right through to the end and beyond this war."

"It will," said Hugh.

"And if one of us dies, or two of us die, even if only one remains, he will have to carry on the way we have begun, carry in his heart the ideal of friendship."

Dirk pondered and he could not find words, but he understood what Michael meant. Hugh felt that he was seeing the stars for the first time.

The fires died out in the night and the clouds came back in black bastions into the sky. Rain began to fall. The Springboks scattered to shelter.

Hugh lay awake for a long time. His head ached. He was lying with many of his fellows in the Italian barracks. The rain beat a tattoo on the roof. A torrent rolled in the valley, singing its mad, free song which no man and no gun could harness. The curtain of the black night and the blinds of sleep enveloped the hills and covered all the pain of the day.

CHAPTER XII

JOAN WAYNE could forget some things easily. She believed now that she had always been willing that Hugh should go and fight. She threw herself wholly into war work and gave time to the Red Cross and to the Governor-General's National War Fund. She organised bazaars and took her First Aid Certificate. She had been

proud of Philip when he decided to give a tenth of his income to war funds. And she told her friends all about it.

She hated every young man she saw in civilian clothes and said most of them were Jews. She said it for the hundredth time at breakfast on that morning in January. It was a fresh, rain-washed morning. A thunder-storm had raged before dawn and the world had been washed clean.

Philip just nodded. It was no use arguing with her, no use reminding her about Michael Weiner. He had done so a few times but she had replied: "I know he's wonderful. Doesn't Hugh always say so? But the majority, darling. And to think of it that we went to war because Hitler persecuted the Jews."

His black eyebrows shot up. He had passion for justice now.

"Who's been telling you that, my dear?"

"Oh, everybody," she said.

"But we went to war first to save Poland."

"But it all began with Hitler killing the Jews."

"He did it for seven years before the war began," he said.

She frowned. "Why, Philip, are you becoming a Communist?"

He laughed outright. "No," he said. "But, Joan dear, you must get your facts right. I suppose you've heard many people say that Hitler did a good job with the Jews."

"All my friends say that," she said. "And another thing, they say that Smuts won't have conscription because he doesn't want to quarrel with the Jews. Many people call him 'King of the Jews' you know."

He wanted to laugh, but instead he grinned. "It's the funniest thing I've heard yet," he said. "Smuts isn't afraid of anybody."

"Then what about the Ossewa Brandwag? They're bombing places; they're in league with Hitler and yet Smuts won't intern them."

He leaned back in his chair and flicked open his cigarette case.

"He would have to intern thousands, tens of thousands, if he interned all the members of the Ossewa."

"And why not?" she shot back.

"Because, oh well, because he's wise I think."

She was in a belligerent mood. "They're enemies of the State aren't they?"

"Yes."

"What happens to enemies of the State in Germany?"

"They get shot or they are put into concentration camps."

"Why can't we do the same?"

"We're a democracy."

She bit savagely into a piece of brown toast. "And Hugh is fighting for a democracy, for all these fellows who are too funky to put on uniform, and he's fighting while the Ossewa Brandwag swine are bombing places. It said in the paper they have been found drilling. It is easy to see they are planning a revolution."

"Maybe," he said.

He was not in a hurry to get to the office. "Many things are wrong," he said as he lit a cigarette. "Take your Governor-General's War Fund. People are giving money to the fund. It's the job of the State to look after these men. The Fund smacks too much of charity."

She smiled at him. "Give me a cigarette," she said. "You're always saying that about the Fund. Look at the time we voluntary workers put in working for it."

"Yes," he said, "but if the State taxed all the people, you women could be doing some real war work."

He leaned across and lit her cigarette. She smiled at him through a cloud of smoke. "I know," she said, "glamour parades and all that. You're always saying it. Don't let's go over the old ground. We disagree, that's all. The world won't be very different after we've beaten Hitler."

"It's got to be," he said.

"Let's walk round the garden," she said. "The dahlias and the zinnias will make a good display this morning."

The lawns ran green to the plots of dahlias and zinnias and there were marigolds with big golden crowns.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said. She took deep gulps of air. "It will always be the same," she added. She stooped over a carnation bed and plucked a pink flower. She put it in his buttonhole, stood on tiptoe and kissed him.

No, it was no use arguing with Joan or with her world. It would go on in the same old way, changing slowly like her beauty. He saw Hugh in her face. She would only think one way.

As he drove down the hill past the University he caught a glimpse of the mine dumps. They looked like clean sand-castles beyond the skyscrapers. He drove his car into a garage near his office. Jim the coloured boy said, "Good morning, Baas." He walked through the sunlit streets. Already the shops were open. The streets were filling. Johannesburg looked as it had looked in the days of peace, prosperous, clean.

To-day he was to meet Carl Joubert. He had written him a note and he was a little surprised that Joubert had telephoned immediately to say that he would come to the office. Carl knew that Philip Wayne was one of the outstanding lawyers of the city, a member of the Gold Club and a follower of Smuts. Moreover, he was an Englishman, and that was enough for Carl. He did not want to see the lawyer, but he was afraid of ignoring him. He immediately thought that his mother or father, or both, knew Wayne, but he could not remember the man's name ever having been mentioned in the house. He had relented after he had burst out of the house several weeks before, and now and again he had telephoned his mother. She had called to see him at his office. That was all she wanted, just to see him. She asked him if he was well. She invited him home. But he would not go home again . . . the breach between him and his

father was as wide as the veld. He could not forgive his father for what he had called the treachery and the fear which pulled him away from his comrades.

The invitation from Philip Wayne puzzled him. He sensed that it had to do with the movement to which he had pledged his life. Perhaps Wayne was in the pay of the Smuts' Government, and he was going to probe, perhaps he knew everything, perhaps Carl Joubert would be in an internment camp to-morrow . . . perhaps, perhaps . . . he bridled his thoughts. What was the use of thinking? He would meet Wayne, measure his man, give nothing away. He had never seen him so far as he could remember, but he visualised the man with a strong face and eyes—eyes sharp as gimlets. He knew that the man's brain was as keen as a dagger . . . else he would not have become such a well-known lawyer. Wayne was the equal of the few Jews who were a power at the Transvaal Bar. And to be as shrewd as a Jew . . . that was enough.

When he was ushered into Wayne's office, he realised that his mental picture of the man had been right. The lawyer was going to cross-examine him. He was taken aback when Philip greeted him in perfect Afrikaans.

"It is good to find an Englishman talking Afrikaans," said Carl, and he was unable to hide the little sneer in his voice.

"Sit down please," said the lawyer, "I talk Afrikaans to Afrikaans people. It is the civil thing to do." He looked at Carl. He, too, had been able to get a mental picture of the man before he had seen him. Just what he expected . . . the long frame, the pale face and the thin lips. The burning eyes. The sneer on those thin lips.

Carl took a seat, leaned back, ran his fingers through his hair and said: "Well, Mr. Wayne, what do you want of me?"

"It's no use beating about the bush, Mr. Joubert," and he looked squarely at Carl and Carl answered his gaze without blinking. "You are a member of the Ossewa, in fact one of the leaders, and I know that the Ossewa is doomed."

A sneer came to the thin lips. "Why be so considerate about me, a man you've never seen until this moment?"

"I can't tell you why I know all about you, Mr. Joubert, but I'm anxious to save you from your foolishness."

Carl shot back: "You know my mother and father, they have come to you."

"I don't know either of them."

Carl winced. But he accepted the lawyer's statement which rang true.

"But why do you want to save me, as you call it?"

"I can't tell you the reasons, Mr. Joubert. But this I do know, the Government will ban the movement. You may now be weaving the rope for your own neck."

"What has that to do with you? What is my life to you?" Carl was angry.

Philip Wayne filled his pipe leisurely. "Go on," he said.

Carl leaned forward, his fists came down on the desk. "Why should you bother? Are you in the pay of the Smuts' Government? Are you an inquisitioner, or what? Out of the blue I get a message from you. Here I am. You tell me I'm running into danger. Is the Government going to use you as a prosecutor? If Ossewa men are to be charged with treason and if your answer is yes to all these questions, I stand where I stand and nothing will move me."

"My answer is no to every question." The lawyer watched a cloud of smoke trailing to the ceiling. "Calm yourself," he added. "Now listen to me. You are a general of the Ossewa. You are the brains behind the bombings, and they are about the most cowardly attacks on innocent people that have ever taken place. You drill men. You plan robberies of secret documents from the military camps. I have enough evidence against you now. I can ring up the Commissioner of Police and this very day you can be placed in a cell."

Carl was white now. "What of all that?" he asked.

It was the lawyer's turn to flame now. "You coward, you won't even come out into the open. You won't fight. Your sort never does."

Carl got to his feet. "I'll fight when the time comes."

Philip Wayne's anger had vanished like a cloud of his smoke from his pipe. "You are a fanatic and fanatics are difficult to persuade. But I do want to tell you that you will find all your plans come to nothing. Just remember my words, to nothing."

Carl was again sitting in his chair. "Who is the person who has paid you to save me from myself? That is how they must have put it to you."

"No one is paying me, Mr. Joubert. Even lawyers, you know, can do some things without fees. I know what you are . . . a writer. You are a poet, too. Why not leave the wretched quarrel of racialism to other men, men who have not the gift of poetry?"

"Freedom is the only poetry I know now, Mr. Wayne."

The lawyer's words were incisive. "But you choose the wrong way to freedom. Bombing is not the way. You destroy the little shops of little Jews."

Carl's lips went into a thin straight line. "The Jews are the bane of my country," he said.

Philip refilled his pipe. "We disagree about many things. I have always in my better moments longed for racial peace between Briton and Afrikaner. It is the only hope for this country. It is a tragedy. I think that this war has come to heighten the break."

"But the people are against the war," said Carl.

"Many of the people are, but they have not been forced to fight."

"If Smuts can find a way, he will make them."

Philip puffed hard at his pipe. Then he said: "We need not argue over that. Is it a man's job to go about as you are doing,

spreading destruction in the dark, drilling men for a rebellion which would be crushed, and all your men killed or imprisoned?"

Carl laughed. "The Boers fought the British before to-day. They didn't do so badly in a war against the big, bullying empire."

"That war should never have happened, Mr. Joubert. It was wrong from the first shot."

Carl Joubert suddenly looked benevolent. "That's a great confession from an Englishman," he said.

"That is the truth as I see it. But all this talk is drifting away from the point."

Again a river ran between them. Carl got to his feet. "You can give me away if you like, but the Ossewa will go on," he said. "True, the pace may be only the pace of an ox, and that was fast enough for my forebears before Jews and Englishmen robbed us of our gold. But the ox always reaches the end of the journey. You are an Englishman and I am an Afrikaner." He was fidgeting with his long hands. "You will go the way that destiny has marked out for you, and I will go my way."

He smiled ironically and held out his hand. "Good afternoon, Mr. Wayne. I am sorry that you have wasted your time."

Philip rose and took the extended hand. "I'm sorry that you can't see it my way, but remember this—there will come a moment when you will remember. My son is away fighting. Perhaps for his sake I should hand you over to the authorities because you are an enemy of the State. You are the enemy of everything I believe in, everything for which my son is fighting—but I shall say nothing. That is my promise, the promise of an Englishman."

Carl walked out without saying another word and Philip Wayne sat down and wrestled with his conscience. Perhaps somebody would be killed to-night with a bomb, perhaps he could now warn the authorities against the rebellion, perhaps . . . perhaps. But Hugh was in love with Elsebe Joubert.

CHAPTER XIII

ELSEBE told her mother that she had gone to Hugh's father about Carl, but she had to tell her later that Philip Wayne had not been able to save him from his folly.

She was in the house when her mother told her father about Philip Wayne. Piet was interested until he learned that the mission had failed. He knew Carl, the son he loved.

"Carl will be more careful now that he knows one the best lawyers in town knows all about it," said Elsebe hopefully.

"He'll only become more cunning," said Piet. "Never let him know how this man Wayne came to be interested in him. That would drive him to hate you, Elsebe."

"No one will tell him, Pa," she said.

It was a sad household now. Mrs. Joubert had grown much older, but had lost none of her sweetness. Piet Joubert used to love the garden, but now he did not bother. In the hot evenings when the garden was parched he allowed it to parch. He spent a lot of time alone. Elsebe saw how eagerly he scanned the headlines in the morning paper. He was always looking to see if there had been any new bombings over-night. She saw the look of relief on his face.

Sometimes when she was teaching, her mind would wander to places she had never seen, places which Hugh wrote about, the desert and the plains, the mountains, the big moons over the battle-field. She studied the maps of the Abyssinian campaigns in the newspapers. Hugh was somewhere in the vast, rolling land, and she saw him striding. At school most of the teachers were Afrikaners and except for herself every one of them was against the war. She kept a still tongue. They said that it was a disgrace that South African troops should be fighting to put back a black king on the throne of a black people. How they hated the black people, like Carl hated them. How they hated the English and the Jews, just like Carl.

Fordsburg where she taught was the back door of the city of gold, filthy, where children played in the gutters. They came every morning out of their crowded backyards—the white, the coloured and the black. They were neighbours in Fordsburg. They were supposed to be segregated into belts, but nobody knew where one belt began and the other finished. Many of the school-children were ill-clothed and pinched with cold and hunger. Some had no boots. Many were the children of poor whites.

Once upon a time in the golden days their forebears were farmers in the golden land. Elsebe knew the story. The old Boers shared their land between all their sons, and they had many sons. And the sons after them had many sons. In time the big farm became a host of little farms, and little farms do not pay in a land of drought where soil erosion has for decades cut big gaps in the land, where the rain storms have carried the top soil away. The people became poor whites living on a lower level than the natives. They had nothing left except their pride, and that pride would not let them do manual work. That, they said, should be done by the black man. They came from the poor land into the rich city, only to find a poor corner. They were unskilled labourers and they earned unskilled pay, about ten pounds a month, and they paid more than a quarter of their earnings for leaking roofs over their heads. Many of them lived on social welfare charity and the maximum was eight pounds a month.

Elsebe had gone into one of the backyards to visit a sick child. Gerda Kruger, a little girl with a wan body and a good brain, was dying of tuberculosis. The father was also dying of the same disease. There were seven other children, and the family lived in two rooms. She met the doctor at the house, a Jew.

"She'll die," said the doctor when they got to the street. "And to think of it, that wretched backyard is built over the richest gold-mine in the world!"

And Gerda died. Elsebe had never come face to face with death until then. She loved the child. She went with her sorrow to her mother, and Martha understood. She went to Magda, and she heard her rail against a system which allowed death to come to children when it could be avoided. She was always sensitive to hurt, and the hurt to others hurt her. The prejudices which imbued so many of her people were flaking away. They were so inborn that it was difficult to get rid of them all. But it was only when it came to the persecution of a child in the school that she felt that she had become a rebel against the shoddiness of racialism.

Hugh had written to her about the courage of the black soldiers, the Abyssinian patriots, the East Africans and the Nigerians. He said that courage knew no colour. The day she received his letter she found when she reached school that the children and many of their parents were in the schoolyard. In front of them was a little boy, Johnny Simon, barefooted, tattered, his cheeks smeared with tears. The teachers came out of the school with the principal. She knew him as a kind man, but now his face was set and his eyes hard. She suddenly realised that the people and the children wanted to stop Johnny from coming to school any more. She looked at the teachers. There was not a gleam of charity in a single face.

A spokesman stepped from the crowd. He was rolling in fat and had little pig's eyes.

"Mr. Erasmus," he said, "This child Johnny's mother gave birth last night to a coloured child. This child Simon is coloured. He has no right to be in the school with our children, white children." Simon was dark but until then he had passed, like thousands of dark-skinned South Africans, as white-pigmented. God had seen to it that the pigments were correct.

Mr. Erasmus said quickly: "The matter will be investigated."

"Investigated," said an old woman, her hair streaking down her face. "I attended his mother last night. I always had my suspicions."

Several people spoke at once. Some passing natives stopped to listen. An old man's thin voice rose above the clamour: "Our children will be taken away this instant if the child is allowed in school to-day."

"The child will be sent home," said Mr. Erasmus.

Elsebe acted on an impulse. She heard the children shouting in derision. She looked at the hard faces. She took the child's hand. "Come, Johnny," she said.

The crowd, taken aback, made room for her. She took the child into the street.

"I'll take you home," she said.

"No, no," he cried.

She bought him some sweets at a Greek shop.

"I shan't go home," he said. "I'm ten you know, and I know everything."

"You're going to be brave about it."

"Yes, but I can't go home to-day. Don't tell on me, please. I'll go to a park. I'll swing and I'll play. Then when the time comes for school to be dismissed I'll go home."

"All right," she said.

She wandered back to the school, and was immediately told that the principal wished to see her. He was standing behind his desk.

"I'm sorry that you did that, Miss Joubert," he said.

"Sorry? What else could I do?" she said.

She looked at him. Was he, too, a fanatic?

"The people were ready to leave when I assured them that the child would not be allowed in school." His voice grew hard suddenly.

"It's no use getting sentimental about such things. Purity of race is more important than sentiment."

She clutched for words but could find none.

"Go to your work," he said. "You will find, I'm afraid, that your colleagues will resent your attitude."

Suddenly she found her voice. "Does it matter to me that they will resent what I did? I was kind to a child who stood alone in a hostile world. I shall never forget it, never. D'you hear me, Mr. Erasmus? I'm not interested in your Nazi creed about purity of race. I'm interested in children."

He broke in. "You will have enough to do to raise the children of our race from the gutters where they have been pitched by the English and the Jews. Do you find any poor children of those races in this city of gold?"

"Many," she retorted.

She was flushed and angry. Her mind burned with bitter words, but he struck her dumb with his next sentence.

"You had better take some lessons from your brother, Carl. Were you not his sister I would dismiss you this instant for insubordination."

She gaped. "I understand now," she said quietly.

She walked out and blindly found her class. When again she could see clearly she stared on sullen faces. She wanted to say bitter things but calm came to her. The children thought as their parents thought. She struggled through the lessons. At the interval Maria Magdalene Leibbrandt, the oldest virgin on the female staff and the most embittered, said to her: "What a spectacle you made of yourself. The child wasn't hurt. Nobody laid a hand on him. He'll get over it. These coloureds don't feel like white people feel."

Elsebe saw the other teachers bunched apart. She looked at Maria. She had always been sorry for her, gaunt, lonely, carrying her misery in her long bony face, but she knew that it was useless to argue. She thought of the controversy which had raged at the

University when Bantu and Indian students were admitted. The Afrikaner students had protested. She had kept aloof, and now she was glad. To-day she had seen the serpent of racialism in its ugliest mood. It was poisonous.

"Miss Leibbrandt," she said, "I'm not trying to defend myself, and if the same thing happens to-morrow I would do the same again."

"You are lost beyond redemption," the woman replied. "This is the time when we Afrikaners must stand together and withstand the English and the Jewish power."

Elsebe walked away. She would be glad when the day was over. When school closed she felt that she had left a prison. The sky was a blue parasol over the world. It was a crisp autumn day and the mauve evening would be blessed.

She telephoned Magda and asked her home to dinner. She was going into the open now. What did it matter what her father thought? At dinner she saw that he was at his ease with Magda and listened to her hopes for the return of Michael. And when Elsebe told him that Michael was a scholar he said: "I think it is because we don't know people that we hate them."

He did not join them after dinner, but said he was going to see a friend. They knew that he would be haunting the street where the offices of *Die Brand* were, just to get a glimpse of Carl, if God vouchsafed to grant him that joy. He had become like a man walking in a dream and fear was always in his eyes.

Elsebe told Magda the story, and she did not exaggerate. There was pain in Martha's face and anger in Magda's. When the story was told Martha spoke first.

"You acted, my child, as I would have a child of mine act. Why are people so cruel?"

"Cruel?" said Magda. She flung out her arms and then let them fall heavily into her lap. She flung back her head. "Diabolical I call it. And I understand it all. That's what happened to Jewish children in Berlin and in Vienna, the most cruel thing that can be done to children."

"The people are born with prejudices and they die with them," said Martha quietly.

Magda was calm now but her face was set. "There is no hope for mankind while this poison corrodes the human heart. They sent consumptives into this land to be cured, but now the people are dying of consumption. Elsebe, I've longed to go to a school to teach but I think that it is better to sell hats to vain women."

"I do hate the thought of going back to that school," said Elsebe. "I wonder if I should go to an English medium school."

"Don't run away," said Martha. "In an English medium school you will find the other nationalism, other prejudices. If the children in both schools could mix without the prejudices of their parents, than all would be well."

"Yes," Elsebe conceded, "it's no use running away."

CHAPTER XIV

THE Abyssinian roads looped through the bush land. They were good roads made by Italian engineers, built for the defence of the country, to allow for swift transport. But now they had become highways for the armies of deliverance.

Hugh and Dirk thought of the rolling South African veld as they came down in the transports into the flats of Jijiga.

Night on the rolling plains and a sickle moon in the sky. The bark of artillery. And Hugh said to Dirk: "I feel as small as an ant."

"We'll bore through everything, Hugh man," said Dirk.

"Look at the mountains, Dirk."

Dirk laughed. And Hugh felt that in that laugh he heard all the confidence of the Springbok Army.

Michael stared through the night at the ramparts of the hills. The stars clustered like big eyes in the sky. A blue Italian searchlight threw its lights on the Marda Pass and across the vast plain of Jijiga.

"It is strange," said Michael, "to think of war with so much beauty around us."

They curled up to sleep. They awakened in the grey light of the dawn. The light picked out the breasts of Marda both on the right side of the road looping through the mountains. Farther to the right was Camel Saddle Hill, on the left Observation Hill.

Hugh had tasted so much action that he was not afraid any more. The Nigerians were attacking the right breast of Marda.

It was brazenly hot. Men crouched behind thorn bushes and then ran to the next. A man would suddenly crawl away to a machine gun nest. And as suddenly as it barked it would be silenced. The Nigerians were winning against all odds. Sunset and darkness. And men curled to sleep now among the hill-tops. They made hollows in the grass. They lay in rock crevices. Hugh felt his limbs going numb but he was too tired to care. In the morning his legs were stiff. The guns spoke and the men moved into action. And they came to the boulder-strewn hill-tops and they found the Italians gone.

The Springboks rested on the mountains, and again Dirk laughed, and Hugh understood.

"It'll all be over in a few weeks, man," said Dirk.

"The Nigerians took the brunt of the battle," said Michael.

Dirk shaded his eyes from the sun and stole a glance at Michael. "All right, Michael man," he said.

"What is it, Dirk?"

"I give in, Michael man . . . courage knows no colour. Yes, they are fine fighters these black men."

The march went on . . . the transports rumbled in pursuit of a beaten enemy. The Marda Pass had fallen in one bitter day of fighting. It had looked impregnable. And now the road looped

through breath-taking mountains, and the Springboks sang songs of the rolling veld, and they talked of being home soon, back in Adderley Street, Capetown, swimming on the south coast of Natal, walking up Eloff Street in the golden city of Johannesburg.

Through the narrow defiles on the magnificent road, above tree-choked gorges and the laughter of running water filling the world.

Fighting and hurrying. That was the whole story through Diredawa and through Harrar. The desert and the hot and dusty bush country seemed a million miles away. The cold Abyssinian highlands mantled the armies in mists.

The Springboks longed to take the road to Addis Ababa, but the bulk of the troops had to chase the Italian armies. They learned that the capital had fallen. The road snaked through crazy mountains to the Combolcia Pass. It rained in the Pass. The avenging armies were outnumbered. Through the slime Hugh and his comrades crawled. They fought many hours, rested a little and then fought on. And all the time the rain tumbled. Day died in a downpour and the men slept in their drenched clothes and awakened with their limbs half frozen.

Night, and Dessie without a light on its hills. Lorries brought food to the dog-tired men. They came on with their lights blazing. They slid back down the road with their lights out.

And Dirk laughed as the rain made a pool around him. Somebody cursed him but he laughed again.

"A grand trick," he said. "That's what the Boers did to your English fathers. A few mounted men would go riding round and round a koppie until the English would be thinking there was a big commando coming."

"But where's the comparison?" someone asked.

"Now the Itis must be thinking there are hundreds of lorries and armoured cars. Reckon Dannie Pienaar thought that out."

Men grunted as if they were satisfied. Dannie Pienaar was loved, the little Boer fighting general, the greatest democrat in the Springbok army.

And Dirk said "We'll go through the Italians when we get over this bloody pass. Dannie's guns will blast them out of their fox-holes."

"Hello, boys." A small man approached out of the darkness. "How are things?"

The man was an Afrikander. His accent was thick and he clipped his English words. He wore a raincoat and it was too dark to see his face.

One man sat up and said: "If the blasted rain would stop we'd be over the mountains."

"For four days you've been fighting," said the man whom they now took to be an officer. "To-morrow we go over. Can't somebody light a fire and then we can have some coffee?"

"Sticks too wet," said Dirk.

"You're not talking like the son of a Boer," came the reply.

Dirk said nothing. He would never be able to say how he found those dry twigs. But there the little fire glowed and a pot of water was boiling. In the flames the crouching men looked into the face of General Dan Pienaar.

"I'm sorry, General," said Dirk quickly in Afrikaans.

"Sorry for what?"

"Wasn't I rude, General?"

Dan Pienaar chuckled. "No," he said. "I want no ceremony boys, I'm one of you."

The general shared a mug with a private. And then when he had gone the men sat dumbfounded. Michael was the first to find his voice. "What a man. I'd go through hell for a general like that."

"You're doing it," said Hugh.

A new dawn came, cold and misty. The Springboks could hear the blood-curdling cries of the Abyssinian patriots storming the hills. They were fuzzy-haired, bare-chested and carried rifles, bandoliers and devilish-looking knives. Their only garment was a long, ragged pair of trousers. They bore up the slippery slopes, slaying as they went.

Dessie fell and there were thousands of prisoners, hundreds of guns, tons of equipment, reservoirs of petrol, barrels of wine and bottles of Chianti. The men ate dehydrated potatoes from tins. It was the first time the Springboks had seen dehydrated food. They drank Chianti and laughed when they saw that the slaughter-house was next door to the church.

Hugh often looked back and thought of the miracle of the advance through the heat and the swamps and now through the land of eternal mist and biting winds. He described it all in a letter to his father.

"The Italians can run but they also know how to block roads," he wrote. "You should see how they left a long natural causeway bridging two peaks in these mountains. It looked as if a giant had passed that way, pulled up the road and had thrown it down into the gorge. I shall never forget the time when our convoy first came into these high mountains. We travelled for a time away from the main road and many times we had to manhandle the trucks through the mud. We built bridges in the evening and found them washed away in the morning. I became a beast of burden and it did me the world of good. It seemed good to sweat from honest labour. We got caught in swamps and you should see the natives pulling the trucks out and we giving a hand. Rain and rain . . . sleep and rain all mixed up. You should see the mists boiling in the valleys. But when the sun shone I held my breath. There can't be anything as grand as these mountains anywhere in the world. I could see a dark green ribbon looping to eternity, a river on a far-away plain. In the sunshine this fantastic, awful world is like a heap of green

satin . . . and in the valley are the chocolate patches by the little Abyssinian villages, and then the forest tops are moving like a green sea. The great peace is broken by the thunder of guns. I sometimes wonder what it's all about, but we move so fast that a man has little time to think."

And the roads ran to the end of the trail to Amba Alagi. The armies mustered under the great peak ten thousand feet above sea level, with a circle of mountains tumbling around it and beyond it. The road coiled in fantastic bends. The mountains were sodden with cloud.

The Springboks knew they had come to the end of the trail, but those forbidding mountains would have to be conquered. They saw the Indians in action and the converging of other black troops. They were fighting side by side with famous English regiments.

They were in a desperate hurry to reach the end of the trail, the bloody trail which had brought them all the way from Kenya, the blistering days and the tired nights, the heat and the cold, the hell of it all. They were angry. They had become professional soldiers, hardened by the heat and the wind, they had shivered in the rain and they had lost one another in the clouds.

The mountains shook with the voices of guns. The eagles flew from their eyries and fled into the lonelier mountains beyond. Hugh saw Dirk running up the mountain, his eyes on fire and his face streaked with sweat. Suddenly from around a rock an Italian emerged. He was mad with rage and fright. Dirk lunged forward, but he was too late. A hand grenade was pitched into his face and exploded. Dirk fell like a log. He was screaming with his hands to his eyes.

"Dirk, Dirk," Hugh ran to him and fell on his knees. He pulled away Dirk's big hands. He recoiled. The eyes were gone. There was nothing but blood on his face. And Dirk moaned. The stretcher-bearers lifted him. They bandaged his poor, smashed face. Hugh walked up the mountain, he fought, he went mad, on the mountain.

And then evening came and the guns stopped barking. The armies went down into the valley and the trail of the Italians came down the mountain, the Duke of Aosta and all his men.

In the night Hugh found Michael and told him about Dirk. "He will never see again, Michael," he said.

"Good God," said Michael, "never again to see his Golden Gate."

The victory won, and it was all ashes. Dirk was blind, the laughing cavalier. They stood staring at the mountain and they hated it. They went back over the looping roads and to the sea, and they found him in a hospital at Mogadishu with his eyes bandaged and his big hands inert.

"It's the Golden Gate, Hugh man and Michael man," he said, "I'll never see it again."

"When you go home," said Hugh, "Elsebe will go and see you."

"And Magda," said Michael.

But Dirk sat limply with his chin on his big chest . . . a broken man.

Never again would he stride across the golden veld, never again see the glory which he had brought in his heart all the way from peace into war. There was nothing to say, for Dirk was tongue-tied. His tragedy was too close. Now he was crying inside.

"We'll see you again," said Michael.

"And I'll not be seeing you, Michael man."

Out in the street the sun was hot. The macadam streets oozed.

"We'll go to a wine saloon," said Hugh, "I'll write to Elsebe and to my father and mother. I'll tell them about Dirk. They must find him if he goes to hospital in Johannesburg. You write to Magda. And then, Michael, we're going to get drunk."

"You've changed, Hugh."

"I've changed. What's it all about? We'll talk when we drink, Michael.

They found a crowded saloon. They wrote their letters. They called for bottles of wine. They tried to drown their sorrow.

Hugh was flushed. His mouth was twisted into a cold grin.

"What's it all about, Michael?"

"What, Hugh?"

"This bloody war blinds men in an instant. You called it a war against tyranny, a war for the future of mankind. That was before we got pitched into it. There's Dirk blind, finished. I'm going to say one last prayer."

He lifted his glass. The wine was red and glowing. "God, if you are God, whatever happens to me in this war let me be killed and not blinded like Dirk."

"That is my prayer, too," said Michael.

Hugh leaned across the small table. He did not hear all the clamour around him. He saw only Michael, two brown eyes in a sunburnt face.

"They ran," said Hugh, "and they squealed like rabbits, and we killed them. What for?"

"It's war," said Michael.

"It's bloody lunacy. And Dirk went blind."

"I'm sorry, Hugh."

"What are you sorry for? You didn't do it. You're breaking your heart about it. You're more sensitive than I am. I know. Listen, Michael," his voice sunk to a whisper, "I'm scared stiff. Ever since I saw Dirk blinded my blood has turned to water."

"It'll pass, Hugh."

"It won't." He banged the table with his clenched fist until the glasses and the bottles rattled. "I know what's going to happen now. I'm scared, and they'll make me fight on. And I'll fight and I'll live through a thousand deaths every day. I'd like to go out quickly."

"It's the wine," said Michael. "You're not used to it."

Hugh nodded. "Maybe. But what if we have to go out before we have lived, before we have tasted life?"

"I've tasted everything, Hugh."

"I haven't," said Hugh.

He left Michael and wandered alone in the night. He found himself looking into the face of a woman. He did not protest when she led him off. He blinked at her nakedness. She was young and slight and slim. She was as dark as the night. And he said to himself, "I'll never come out of this war alive. I'm going to take everything, dregs and all." He gave her all the money he had. He staggered out into the night and sat by the sea on the cool white sands. The sea was soothing. The fever had gone out of his brain and his body and he felt cool. He lay back and stared at the stars, but he closed his eyes for he felt that he was looking at the blinded eyes of Dirk. He turned and slept.

He awoke before dawn, sat up suddenly. His head ached. He went back into the town. The saloons were still open. He had a drink. He barged into Michael as he was going out.

"God," said Michael, "I've been looking for you everywhere."

"I slept on the sands and it was good."

Michael smiled. "It's good to see you, Hugh man."

Hugh's eyes clouded. "That's just what Dirk would have said. Poor Dirk."

They went and had breakfast, and then the town was filled with the news of Hitler's march on Russia. The whole town was talking.

"There goes Hitler to his doom," said Michael.

"How do you know, Michael?"

"Nothing can conquer the new Russia."

As the day wore on the church bells rang. The drinking went on in the saloons. The soldiers were full of argument. Russia, some said, would not last long, and Hugh heard Michael say, "You wait. Hitler has gone to his Moscow just like Napoleon."

CHAPTER XV

HENRIK, the coloured herdboy, could hear the waves roaring in Honedeklip Bay. He could not see the sea from the little hill, for there was a mist all over the Namaqualand desert. June was the heart of winter, the rain was cold. He gathered his rags closer around him.

He tried to shelter behind a little bush, but it was of no use. The rain came down steadily. He moved with his herd of sheep and goats and he longed for the evening so that he could take his herd home to the kraal.

He dreamed of summer, when it was quite pleasant to be out with the flocks of Sarel Potgieter. Then a man could snatch a little

sleep in the heat of the day. But now everything was cold and grey. Henrik shivered. He was wizened like a dried-up orange. His legs were like sticks and his teeth yellow and decayed. His little sloe-black eyes were hidden behind quivers of wrinkles. He remembered that far away over the sea there was a war on. Somebody had told him that the guns made a louder noise than the angry sea. He did not believe that. The sound of the sea was the loudest in the world and nothing man had made could make such a noise. It was good even to-day to hear the sea. There was companionship in its voice.

Again he longed for the summer. When the days were warm and sunny a man could see far, and his master always told him to watch for strange men. He knew that the desert had diamonds, and sometimes strange men came and tried to steal them. But the diamonds belonged to the Government and no man was allowed to take them away.

He was standing deep in thought watching the goats nibbling at a bush. Suddenly he heard footsteps. His ears were still keen. He stared through the rain and saw the shadow of a tall man. His heart missed a beat. The shadow became real. He was suddenly frightened. No man—and here was a white man—could have come out of that sea to-day, for it was like a beast of prey. The man staggered up to him. He carried a suitcase and kitbag. The man slumped to the sand.

Henrik was on his knees. "Baas," he said, "are you ill?"

The man replied in Afrikaans: "Tired to death I am."

"Have you come out of the sea?" asked Henrik in a frightened voice.

The man laughed shakily. "No," he said, "I lost my way."

"Then thank God, Baas," said Henrik, "had I not been here you would have been lost and died this night. For it will be as cold as ice."

The man's breathing became easier. He rummaged in his kitbag and fetched out some lumps of sugar. He gave them to Henrik.

"Sugar warms the blood," said Henrik. "You should also eat some."

"I don't want any now," said the man. He was strongly built. Henrik noticed the breadth of his shoulders. He had big, strong hands.

"You are a strong man," said Henrik, "else you would never have lived through the desert."

A smile flitted across the man's mouth. "I'm stronger than an ox," he said.

He produced a bottle half full of wine. "I'll give you this if you tell me that I can reach a farm to-night."

Henrik's mouth watered. But he knew how to be polite to Europeans. "You are cold and wet, Baas," he said. "Take a drink before you give it to me."

"No," said the man, "I've had enough. But shall I find shelter?"

"I shall take you to my master, Sarel Potgieter, but he'll want to know how you got here." Henrik paused. "Maybe he'll ask about diamonds."

"Do I look like a diamond smuggler?"

"No," said Henrik, "you look like a gentleman, but I've been herding here since I was a piccanin and I never saw a man come out of the sea alive."

The man sat up. "I didn't come out of the sea," he said angrily.

Henrik shrank back. "Of course not," he said.

The man pulled out a piece of sausage. "Here," he said giving it to Henrik, "Take me to your master and I'll give you a pair of boots."

Henrik's heart danced. He did not possess a pair of boots. The man was an angel who had come out of the sea.

"Let's be going then," he said. "It's many miles."

The man groaned as he rose to his feet. He towered above Henrik. Henrik whistled to his flock and they turned homewards. He carried the suitcase. It was wet and heavy. The big man was shivering as he walked. His shoulders sagged. Henrik in all his life had never seen such a tired European.

"How far?" came the question after they had trudged half a mile.

"A long way," said Henrik. But the man asked so often how much farther that at last Henrik replied: "Not much farther, Baas."

It rained all the time. The mist was like a heavy blanket. But Henrik could have found his way home blindfold. He saw how the man's eyes lit up when he saw the homestead. He hurried, and Henrik took him up to the door. "You'll find master in," he said. And then he added: "When shall I have the boots?"

"To-morrow," said the man, "and I'll never forget you."

"I'll never forget you, Baas," said Henrik.

Sarel Potgieter came to the door in answer to the knock. "Good evening," said the stranger faintly, "I'm dying for shelter."

"Come in," said the farmer.

He was small, bearded and stocky. He eyed the stranger coldly. The man walked up to the kitchen stove and stood with his back to it and already the steam was rising from his drenched clothes.

"Who are you?" asked the farmer.

"Willem Kemp. A student from Johannesburg. I was riding a motor-cycle to visit a relative of mine on the border of the Cape and Namaqualand. I had a breakdown. I walked all day through the desert."

The old man's eyes seemed to bore through him. "Open that case and that bag, then," he said.

"Why?"

"What if you're a diamond smuggler, Mynheer Kemp? The police often come round."

The man unpacked the case and the bag. They contained a

suit of clothes, underwear, a pair of boots, shaving kit and a bundle of notes.

"You have a lot of money there," said Sarel Potgieter.

The man nodded. "Anyhow, I have no diamonds. And I'm hungry and cold. I don't think much of your hospitality."

Sarel apologised. "I'm sorry," he said, "but damn me if your coming is not the strangest thing that has ever happened to me in my life. Out of the desert you come. I cannot understand you. I'll get some dry clothes and I'll arrange about supper."

He went to the kitchen. After a few minutes he took the stranger to a bedroom. "Take off your wet things," he said. "Put these on," indicating a bundle of clothes on the bed.

The farmer back in the kitchen was puzzled. There was something odd about the man who called himself Willem Kemp, he decided. But he had no diamonds on him, and that was a good thing.

When the man came into the kitchen his tiredness seemed to have vanished. He looked strange in Sarel's clothes. He was a big, bony man and Sarel was short. The trouser bottoms were on the top of the boots.

"I feel good now," said Willem Kemp.

A coloured maid brought in the food. Bacon and eggs. There was little talk as they ate. Willem Kemp was ravenous. Sarel kept his eyes on his face. Yes, perhaps he did look like a student, but then, was he not a little too old?

"How old are you?" he shot out.

"Twenty-five."

"Oh, I thought you were older."

They sat by the stove after supper in arm-chairs, the seats of which were made out of hide strips. Sarel wanted to find out something definite about the stranger. He filled his pipe.

"Where's your pipe?" he asked.

"I don't smoke."

"Oh. Perhaps cigarettes. I haven't any."

"I don't smoke," said Willem Kemp.

"What you miss," said Sarel. He lit his pipe and puffed hard.

"It's a mess," he said, "with this war and our country again split racially."

"Yes," said Willem Kemp. The rain beat on the roof. He shuddered thinking of the rainsoaked wastelands.

"What do you think of the Ossewa Brandwag?" the old Boer asked, and he watched the man's face closely. But the man was quite calm as he answered, "Not much."

"I should say so," said Sarel. "Bombing places and all that. That's not the job for true Boers."

He thought he saw the man wince. "Don't you agree?" he asked.

"Yes," he said. "My blistered feet ache."

"Would you like to go to bed now?"

"No, thank you. It's good to feel the warmth of this fire."

"Lucky for you you met old Henrik. Otherwise you'd have died."

"I know. I promised him a pair of boots. Those in the suitcase."

Sarel laughed. "He has never worn a pair of boots in his life."

"He was so glad when I told him."

"He'll sell them to somebody for a little wine."

"That doesn't matter. I always keep a promise. He'll get the boots."

Sarel tried to draw the man out. "What do you think of Jan Smuts?"

Willem stared at the stove and said: "I'd rather not say."

"So you're not a Smuts' man."

"I don't belong to any political party."

"That's strange for an Afrikaner to say."

There was a gap of silence in which Sarel again filled his pipe. Then he said: "Damn me, I can't make you out. Here you come, a stranger. Said you were riding a motor-cycle. It doesn't make sense."

Willem Kemp jumped up. "Why are you cross-examining me? Where's your hospitality? If you think I'm a rogue I'll go."

Again Sarel apologised. "You can't go on a night like this. My nearest neighbour is ten miles away and you'd lose your way, and in any case old Johannes Steyn would cross-question you too. We're a suspicious people in this inhospitable land, Mynheer Kemp. You see, the police are always asking us to be on the lookout for the diamond smugglers." Sarel suddenly decided to ask a blunt question. "Are you a German spy?" he said.

Willem Kemp laughed. Sarel saw his even, white teeth.

"How could a German spy come in with the South African coasts so well guarded?"

"Our coast is long and rugged. A man could come in a boat and hide for weeks in one of the little coves," said Sarel.

"How could I have South African money on me if I were a spy? You saw my roll of notes."

"Yes, there must be thousands of pounds. Why do you travel with so much?"

Sarel felt that Willem Kemp was uneasy as he answered: "I was taking the money to my uncle."

"But even here in these wild parts we go to the dorp and put money in the bank," said Sarel.

"My grandfather is still old-fashioned. He lives in the Transvaal," said Willem Kemp. "He gave me the money to take to my uncle. He thinks he'll die soon so he's sharing his money between his sons. Then there will be no death duties to pay on the estate."

Sarel gave in on that point. He could well imagine an old Boer doing that. The man was as hard as stone. The talk drifted to the war, but Willem Kemp was not interested in the war.

Sarel tried another shot. "What do you think of Adolf Hitler?"

"He's a clever man."

"I'll admit that, but do you think he'll win the war?"

"I think he will."

"Would you follow him?"

"I don't know."

They had talked for hours. The stranger yawned and Sarel again apologised. "I shouldn't have kept you up so long after your ordeal in the desert," he said. "Will you be going to-morrow?"

"Yes, how can I get to the nearest dorp?"

"I have a car, I'll take you."

Sarel found it difficult to sleep. Willem Kemp's room was next door. The man soon slept.

In the morning Sarel drove him to the dorp. Willem Kemp said that he would get a train to Capetown. He offered Sarel a five-pound note, which the farmer indignantly refused. "I don't know what's coming over young Afrikanders," he said. "They forget that Boer hospitality costs nothing."

"I'm sorry," said Willem Kemp. "You went to much trouble."

It was a fine day. The rain had ceased. Sarel after he reached home went in search of Henrik and found him wearing the big boots which Willem had given him.

"The stranger puzzled me, Henrik," said his master. "I think he came out of the sea."

"He came out of the sea, Baas."

"How do you know?"

"I was curious too, Baas. This morning I followed his spoor. It was plain in the sand. It was the spoor of a very tired man who took short steps and often rested. The footprints led all the way to the Bitter River. They stopped suddenly on the sands of the bay. The man came out of the sea."

"In a boat?"

"I could not find a boat, but the man came out of the sea."

Sarel followed the spoor and was reassured that Henrik was right. Many days passed and then suddenly some plain-clothes police called on Sarel. Who was the stranger who had come out of the sea? Sarel described him.

"I suspected him of diamond smuggling, but he had no diamonds," said Sarel. "I cross-questioned him but he was vague. In fact, he was always on his guard. He had a roll of money."

"How much?" asked the police sergeant.

"I don't know, but I should think thousands of pounds. I thought he was a rogue but I couldn't pin him down. I asked him if he was a German spy and he laughed."

"That's just what he is," said the sergeant, "a German spy . . . Simon Nel."

"What! The great boxer and wrestler, the man who could fight as well as he could wrestle, the strong Afrikander?"

"That's him."

Sarel fingered his chin. "He was a fine specimen of a man, too. I never thought of Simon Nel. I used to read about him in the papers. He was going to be the champion boxer and wrestler of the world, and people said if he'd only stuck to one thing at a time he'd have done it."

The spoor had disappeared but he and Henrik were able to show the police the exact track the man had taken. The police searched for a boat but they could not find one. They said that Simon Nel had either come out of the sea or he had been dropped by parachute. It was unlikely that an aeroplane could have flown so far. But there was no boat.

Sarel was shown photographs of Simon Nel. "They look like the man who was at my house, but he's older," he said.

"Of course," he was told, "He has been out of the country for four years."

"What's he going to do?" asked Sarel.

"That's what we'd like to know," said the sergeant.

They went away, and every day Henrik looked out to sea waiting expectantly for another stranger to come and give him sugar, wine and a pair of boots.

Weeks later the story filtered through from the wastes of Namaqualand to the dorps and thence to the cities. Carl Joubert was working in the office one night when Julius Theron said to him: "Carl, Simon Nel has landed in Africa. The police think he was put ashore from a German submarine. He was seen in the Namaqualand desert, and everywhere every man of the C.I.D. is looking for him."

Carl's heart jumped. Simon Nel. Landed from a German submarine. The thing was too good to be true. He had come straight from Adolf Hitler. He went to a meeting of the inner circle of the Ossewa Brandwag the following night. The story of Simon Nel had been featured in the newspapers. But not a man there knew of the whereabouts of Nel.

"I know," said Carl, "that the official leaders of the Ossewa will disown Nel. But he is the man who must lead us."

He saw the fire in the fanatical eyes of his men.

"Keep your eyes open," he said. "Messages must be sent to all our trusted men. Simon Nel must be found and told that he can lead the nucleus of the Ossewa that is determined on revolution."

The rebels needed a dynamic personality to lead them, a hero of the people, and Simon Nel was the man. Simon Nel would set fire to the embers of revolt. The men had become tired of empty promises. Many had had cold feet when two dynamitards had been arrested, tried and sentenced to death. They had been reprieved, but the sentence had frightened many men on whom he would have gambled his life that they would never turn from the path of relentless duty.

Messages went through underground channels. Simon Nel was eluding the police. Simon Nel was in Johannesburg . . . in Bloemfontein . . . he had been seen in a country dorp. Rumours flew around. But one day Carl got a message. He was going to meet Simon Nel.

CHAPTER XVI

JUNE was not yet done. Joan and Philip Wayne were sitting in deck-chairs in the garden. Nicodemus came down the path wearing the same old grin which Philip had known for all the years Nic had been with them. It never changed, except when he solemnly asked about Basie.

He did so now. He stopped with his cap in his hand.

"Have you heard from Basie, master?"

"You asked me the other day and I told you," his master replied. "He's not coming home. He is going to a place called Egypt, he thinks, where there is nothing but desert, where it seldom rains and nothing grows."

"Then why is he fighting for a place like that, master?"

"The Lord only knows, Nic."

"You see," said the Basuto, "I'm going to Sophiatown, and I think I'll ask the God of the white man to look after Basie."

His mistress said: "But Nic, God is the God of all people, black and white."

Nicodemus shook his head. "Oh no, missus," he said, "He can't be. He has given the white man all the world."

His master chuckled. Nicodemus smiled and went down the path.

"Fancy him saying that, Philip," she said.

"Very shrewd I thought," he replied.

She sighed. "He's a real Hitler, Nic is. But what can you do? He worships Hugh, and Hugh thinks the world of him. He's always asking about him. But where do you think he got that idea about God?"

"It doesn't matter," said Philip. "When Nic says a thing like that it means that the Bantu at last is thinking aloud."

"I wish you'd talk simple language," she said. "What do you mean?"

He smiled with his eyes as he answered: "The black people are awakening. They are beginning to wonder whether God is white because, as Nic said, God seems to have given the white man the world. Doesn't it look like it?"

"Good Lord, Philip, are you turning Communist just because Russia is now our ally?"

He lit his pipe and laughed through the smoke. "I think it will turn out for the best that Hitler blundered in attacking Russia.

Yes, in spite of what the old fossils at the Club say. Most of them give the Russians three weeks. The three weeks are nearly over."

"But a cabinet minister also said three weeks."

"Of course, yes," he said. "He didn't know what he was talking about. Russia is too vast to fall in three weeks or in three years."

She took a cigarette out of her case. She lit it. Then she said: "But it is a pity, isn't it, that we should have a Godless country like Russia for an ally?"

He looked up. "You're thinking like a nationalist or a British Israelite," he said. "Anyhow, what does it matter? We know just as little about the Russians as we know about the Chinese. And, by the way, most of the Chinese are heathens according to our standards of religion." He added quickly: "Not that our standards are very high."

She shifted the conversation. "Philip, what about this mad Afrikaner, Simon Nel? The papers are full of him. What are our police doing?"

It was his turn to sigh. "Madam," he said, "I hope I never have you in a witness box. Well, here goes. Simon Nel is at large. He is believed to have landed from a German submarine. He is bound to gather a lot of rebels around him, but I don't think he'll be much of a problem. As to why the police haven't yet caught him . . . well, South Africa is rather a big slice of country."

"All right," she said. "I'm going to have a nap. You'll sit here and dream I suppose."

"Yes, a little. I'm wondering when Dirk Cilliers will be coming home. There's talk that a troopship is bringing down the wounded."

"You mustn't talk about ships, Philip."

"I know," he said, "but every second person you meet is talking shipping or treason."

He was alone. The hum of cars filled Jan Smuts' Avenue. The war seemed to be in another planet. He thought of Dirk, big Dirk. Hugh had written again after that short note. He could see that disillusion was creeping into Hugh's letters. It was as he knew it would be. War did that. There came to him an aching longing to see him. He said a prayer without words. He thought of the agony of half the world caught up in war, and he felt impotent. Suddenly he thought of Carl Joubert. Would he join Simon Nel if Nel eluded the police net? He took a sudden decision to go over to the Jouberts. He had never been, but there would be no harm in it. He would walk. It was only two miles to Rossmore.

He told Joan that he was going for a walk. "It will do you good," she mumbled. "Will you be home for tea?"

"I don't think so. I'm going a long way." He strode out down Empire Road and then his pace slackened. He was not used to walking. Cars glided past. He wondered why rationing of petrol was being postponed. It would come soon. He thought of the men on the tankers who brought the precious fluid to South Africa

for people to go joy-riding. But didn't he drive a car himself and didn't his wife have one too?

He found the Jouberts without much difficulty. Piet was sitting on the stoep and rose as the stranger approached. A sudden fear gripped his heart.

"Mr. Joubert?" said Philip Wayne.

"Yes, sir." Piet immediately sensed the cultivated English voice and his fears grew.

"Is Elsebe in?"

"Yes, yes." Oh, it was not what he thought. "Will you come in?" Elsebe came to the door. Her face went a dead white.

"No," said Wayne quickly. "I haven't any bad news, Elsebe. I thought I'd come and see you. Just that."

The blood came back into her cheeks. He was introduced to Martha. He suddenly felt humble, and he did not know why. There was something in her eyes which he had never seen in any other. In her face, too, he saw the shadow of terror when his name was announced.

"It's nothing," he said. "It was a fine day for a walk."

Piet stuttered: "Are you Mr. Wayne the lawyer?"

"Yes."

"It's about Carl you've come about then?"

"No Mr. Joubert." The panic went out of Piet's eyes. Wayne took a chair. He glanced round the room. It was pleasant and homely, and that woman was its symbol.

"How is Carl?" he asked casually.

"He's well," said Piet. "I often see him. He's well."

"I'll make a cup of tea," said Martha, and off she went.

"And how are you, Elsebe?" asked Wayne.

"Quite well, thank you. Hugh is going to Egypt, he thinks."

"Yes, a devil of a place."

"You're speaking of your son, Mr. Wayne?"

"Yes, Mr. Joubert. Elsebe and Hugh were at University together."

"Yes I know," said Piet.

They drank tea and talked trivialities. And then Martha with her eyes on Wayne's face said: "Mr. Wayne, I believe in facing things, although I'm not very brave. I want to thank you first for what you tried to do when you spoke to Carl that time."

Piet was fidgeting. "Please, Piet," she said, "there's no need to be afraid. But you have come to-day, Mr. Wayne, because you wanted to know something about Carl. Our sons are the treasures of our hearts. You can speak openly to us. It's no use hiding the truth which cannot be hidden."

"I did come about Carl," he said bluntly. "The thought struck me suddenly when I was in the garden . . . I wondered if he knew Simon Nel."

Piet jumped up from his chair. "That's what I was afraid of all the time," he said.

"I am merely asking a question, Mr. Joubert."

"If Carl doesn't know Simon Nel then he will know him, if I know Carl."

"That will be a pity," said Wayne.

"Why?" asked Martha.

"Because Nel is a dangerous man, and in time he'll be caught. He will be charged with high treason."

There was a long silence. Elsebe broke it. "What can we do, Mr. Wayne?"

"Nothing," he said. "It's no use my seeing Carl. I know that."

"We must leave everything to God," said Martha.

That seemed to close the conversation. Elsebe tried to stir the embers but there was nothing more to be said. She walked some of the way with Wayne.

"I'm waiting every day to hear that Dirk Cilliers is in the country," she said. "I think you might ask the authorities to see that he comes to a hospital in Johannesburg."

"I will," he said. "I never thought of it, Elsebe."

"He'll have friends here. Magda and I will go and see him. I'm sure mother will let me bring him home too."

He went on his way alone. He had never thought of that. He would ask Joan if he could bring Dirk home to sit in the garden. He would be lonely. He and Dirk would smoke together.

On the following morning he telephoned a friend in the medical section of the Union Defence Force. Some weeks later he received a call stating that Dirk was in a Johannesburg hospital. Immediately he drove to the hospital, the home of a Rand millionaire which had been handed over to the Red Cross for the duration of the war. It was a mansion with tall trees around it, with terraced gardens and lily ponds, a park in the heart of a suburb.

When he was taken to Dirk Philip found Elsebe and Magda there. Elsebe explained: "Dirk 'phoned me first and then Magda. Dirk, here's Hugh's father."

Dirk was sitting up in bed, his eyes heavily bandaged. He held out a shaky hand and Wayne took it. "Hello, Dirk," he said, and his voice choked.

"Hello, Hugh's father," said Dirk. "Hugh's all right. He's a grand boy, man."

They did not say much. What could they say? The happy warrior had come home blind.

As the days wended into spring Dirk went to the home of the Waynes. He sat in the garden and smoked with Hugh's father, and Nicodemus came to him and said, "I'm sorry, Baas, for you are my Basie's friend."

Dirk's ears pricked up. For Nicodemus immediately knew that Dirk was an Afrikaner and he spoke in Afrikaans.

"But Basie will come home, won't he, Baas?"

A slow smile played on Dirk's big mouth and Philip's heart leapt to see it. "He'll come home," he said.

And Nic went back to his work mumbling some old Sesutu song.

"I've heard that song in the Golden Gate," said Dirk.

Joan Wayne showered gifts on Dirk. Her heart bled for him and always seeing him she feared for Hugh. It was good to be driven in one of the cars of the Waynes . . . to feel the wind on your poor blind face . . . to hear the voice of the big city. But Dirk was happier when he was with Magda or Elsebe. They often used to visit him together. He walked with his arms entwined in theirs.

He had tea with Magda in her flat. He went home with Elsebe to her garden, and he found peace in the voice of Martha. And when his mother came, his mother with her lined face and her toil-worn hands, Martha had her to stay in her home. He knew somehow that he did not want his mother to meet Hugh's mother. His mother cried. He had heard her crying in the night when he could not sleep, crying although she was hundreds of miles away.

The spring sun on his face in Martha's garden and the sweet voice coming over to him. He had never seen her but he could describe her from her feet to her head, and he knew her eyes. And Elsebe would be as quiet as a mouse while Martha talked.

"Dirk," she said, "you'll have to get a hold on something, or you'll only pine your heart away."

"And what can I do, Tante Martha, except to die?"

He had accepted her now as Aunt . . . every Afrikander woman with a family likes to hear the children of other people call her Tante. It is an expression of their love and their trust.

"Oh I know, Dirkie . . ." and she used the diminutive of his name, as if she were talking to a child, "that it is hard for a strong man like you, you were a king with your great frame and your lusty voice. It is hard to be like a child again. But there is only one way for you to find peace . . . in the heart of God."

She saw the lines of his mouth harden. "Better it would have been if God had let me die on the slopes of Amba Alagi. It isn't the will of God that I should be blind."

"No Dirkie, it is the evil of war that made you blind."

Back in hospital he would brood over the things she told him. Back in the garden again her voice came to him like the voice of the river running through the valley of the Golden Gate.

"You will learn Braille," she said. "You will sit in the sun and read. You will read the Bible in Braille."

He cried out from an overburdened heart: "I'm not a book man, Tante. I want to see the crops grow, I want to see the eagle fly. I climbed the rocks far up to the nests of the rock pigeons when I was only a few years old. Now I must be led along a garden path."

"Have some tea," she said, and she held a cup to his mouth.

"Have some tart made by me, and the apples are country apples from the Free State," and she held the plate near his hands.

He sat in the evening listening to the wireless. "You can always listen to the songs and the humour of your people," she said.

And he would be telling Magda about the power of Martha Joubert.

"I have none of what she calls religion," Magda would say, "but she's a lovely woman." And then for the thousandth time: "How did Michael look when you saw him last?"

"Fit he was and brown like a berry, and his mind clear like the sky when the rain is far off."

"God, I want him to come home. I'm lonely." The cry would be wrung from her heart, "but I know he'll go right through to the end. He suffered so much."

"How wonderful it must be to be loved as you love him."

He knew it. He loved her himself. He had a rough honesty which would never allow him to tell her what was in his heart. She was the wife of his friend. He remembered her face, rich, glowing, and the big luminous eyes and the strong hands. He remembered her slim, lissom body. There were times when he could not sleep and he thought of her. Women were meant to be fondled and loved . . . they had come and gone in his lusty days, and he could not remember half of them now. Times when he rode his horse thirty miles just to sleep with a woman, and he would ride back before dawn. All gone. Who would have the great lover, Dirk Cilliers, now?

When thoughts of the fighting in Abyssinia came to his mind he cast them away angrily. In his power he had been merciless, as merciless as his people had been with the Bantu when they crossed the frontiers and the black men barred their path. He had never felt sorry for killing Italians until he had been blind for a few weeks. He thought of the wrath of God.

He had seen old men in the dorp churches, big rugged old men who had been notorious, according to gossip, for their loving in the days of their youth. And when the lust had gone out of their loins they had become religious. They were hard men . . . they wanted to deny youth the joys they had known in their own wild youth. He sometimes thought in the glorious days that he too would crawl back to God when he grew old, and he would repent . . . it would be easy then.

Times when out in the veld with Philip Wayne he smelt the mighty fragrance and his heart nearly broke. He could visualise the sun across the vastness. He was groping to some light and he knew it would have to be the light of Martha Joubert's lamp.

And one day sitting with Magda in the gardens opposite the station Dirk was listening to the voice of the city.

"You'll be going home soon," said Magda. "You'll sit in the sun and talk with old friends."

"Sit in the sun like a tired old man," he said. "Sitting in the sun."

CHAPTER XVII

WHILE the detectives and the police were toothcombing the land for Simon Nel, Carl met him in a house just off Jan Smuts' Avenue near the Zoological Gardens in Johannesburg. He had been asked to come alone and by tram and to watch that he was not followed. Carl glanced back now and again as he walked up the street. There was no one following him. The house was away from the street and a long, crazy-paving path led up to the front door. He had walked a few paces when a man's voice halted him. The man was standing under a tree.

"The password, brother?" came the challenge in a low voice.

"Berchtesgaden," said Carl.

"Pass brother." When he reached the stoep another man rose from a deck-chair, and challenged: "The second password, brother?"

"Ossewa," said Carl.

The man opened the door and waved him into the front room which was crowded. It reminded him of the secret meetings he had held with his own followers. He glanced round quickly. He recognised some of the men.

"I'm Carl Joubert," he said.

Simon Nel walked across giving a salute which was like a Nazi salute. "Welcome brother," he said as he took Carl's hand. Carl winced. The handclasp was like steel. "Take a chair," said Simon Nel, and as Carl sat down he asked: "Why have you come to join me?"

Carl took in the big frame of the man, the stern brown eyes, the hard chin. "I'm a general in the Ossewa Brandwag," he said, "but the Ossewa has got cold feet. I want action."

"Hear, hear," said one of the men.

Simon Nel raised a hand. "You're a journalist and you can write well?"

"Yes," said Carl.

"We want journalists, there's a lot I want to write. You shall write for me. We want propaganda. You shall do it."

Carl was taken aback—"But I want to fight too."

"You shall fight," said Simon Nel.

Carl now got a closer view of the men. Most of them were country men, big-muscled, ruddy, sun-warmed; men who could shoot straight like their old Boer fathers. They were under the spell of Simon Nel, and Carl understood why. He knew that he would be a disciple of the saviour who had come to save Afrikanerdom before he met him, but now he was more than certain.

Simon Nel rose. "We're all here," he said, "the nucleus of the National Socialist rebels who will begin the revolution." He raised his hands and clenched his fists. "You will go each one of you and bring into our organisation men who will devote their lives to the cause. Trust nobody. Be sure, dead sure, before you bring them in. Tell them they carry their lives in their hands."

He was a dramatist, his words were clear-cut and incisive. He was a natural orator. He looked . . . yes, Carl got it, he looked like Hitler. He had modelled his stance and his actions and his facial expressions on those of the master.

"I have money, rolls of it," said Simon Nel. "The British, the damnable British, bought traitors with gold in every country they conquered, before they conquered them." He smiled. "The money I have will be used to buy information, to buy plans of tanks, guns, ammunition, to sabotage Jannie Smuts' war machine. I have American dollars, rolls of them too. My good German friends gave them to me."

Suddenly he laughed. "The police want me dead or alive. I saw my photograph in front of a police station to-day. But it isn't a photograph of me as I look now." Just as suddenly he became solemn.

"Listen brothers, I'm here to win the revolution or die in the attempt. Did I come from a German submarine? Did I drop by parachute? That is the question Jan Smuts would like answered. I look into your eyes and into your very souls and I trust you all. I am a parachute jumper. I was a parachutist in the army of Adolf Hitler, the greatest, mightiest army in the world . . . and Adolf Hitler, the great Fuehrer is the greatest general the world has known or will ever know." He paused to lick his lips. "But I came from the sea. I came from a submarine all the way from Germany. I came with the blessing of Hitler. Some day you will see him, the man whom God has chosen to rule the world." His voice rose slightly, "It was a long voyage. At night when we rose to the surface to charge our engines it was like heaven with the cool wind in my face and the fresh air in my lungs. And I thank God for life and the opportunity to come home to smash the English yoke which has for so long throttled the life of my people, my beloved Volk. They put me off in a rubber dinghy on a wild sea before dawn. My brothers, it was hell. I pulled for the shore and the waves carried me back and the waves tossed me about, and I prayed with the cold water falling over me for the strength to get to that shore. And God gave me strength." He was speaking quickly in a low, tense voice. "God spared me, that I know, and yet I don't know how I reached the shore. Unseen hands were rowing with me, unseen hands helped me to drag the dinghy ashore. I buried the boat in the sand away from the sea. And I saw the desert before me." Now there was agony in his face. "I went on trek, the most terrible trek that a man has undertaken. I wandered all day and all night and the next day. I plodded on. I refused to sleep. I nibbled at the food my German brothers had given me, I was dazed but I knew that I had to pull through . . . time and again I summoned my waning strength. I wanted to lie down and die in the desert. And the rain came and drenched me. I trekked on and my soul was tortured and my heart near to breaking."

He put a hand to his forehead. He wiped off big beads of sweat. "I fell at last on my knees and I cried loud enough to pierce the black clouds that enveloped me, I cried on God not to desert me . . . I wept in the rain. And again a new strength came to me and I saw sheep . . . you know the rest. The newspapers have told the story."

He sat down heavily. He drained a glass of water and asked for another. He drained that also. He swung his eyes round the table. "Do you understand why God saved me, why Adolf Hitler sent me?"

Awed, they nodded. They could not find words.

"And now," said Simon Nel, "it is action. Here on the Reef, in Pretoria, in Bloemfontein, in the Cape, in the Free State, we'll build our National Socialist cells." His fist smashed on the table. "We'll rob the powder magazines. We'll get machine and Bren guns. We'll get in touch with Germany by wireless. We'll work like lightning. Whisper in the ears of the Afrikaner soldiers in the camps. Dynamite the Jews. And then one day we'll come riding in cars, the new Boer commandos. We'll overwhelm the camps and the cities. We'll put the damned English and the Jews up against the wall, and the Afrikaners who follow Janie Smuts."

The hearts of the men pounded and Carl shouted: "I swear with you, Simon Nel, to win freedom for my Volk or die in the attempt."

"And I," cried another man, and the vow was taken up all round the table.

Simon Nel's eyes grew hard and glinted like steel. "I have an oath which none of you can break. It will be signed with your own blood."

He looked around and his eyes fell on Carl and Carl withstood the stare . . . "You will be the first, Carl Joubert," he said.

Carl walked up to him. "I'm ready," he said.

Simon Nel unfolded a flag. He held it in his outstretched arms. "This you know is the Vierkleur, the flag of the Transvaal republic, for which many of your fathers died."

Tears sprang into many of the men's eyes.

"I understand your emotion my brothers," said Simon Nel.

Almost imperceptibly the heads bowed to the flag. Simon Nel crushed it to his chest. "This is our beloved flag," he said. "It will fly again from the dorps and from the cities, from the rooftops of the homesteads of the Boers."

The melodrama was drama to the man. Simon Nel unfolded a long sheet of typewritten paper. He raised his hand and Carl Joubert did likewise, and he took the typescript and read in a loud even voice:

"National Socialist Rebels . . . this is my solemn oath. All my fight and striving is for the freedom and independence of the Afrikaner Volk in South Africa, and for the building up of a National Socialist State in accordance with the idea of Adolf Hitler as applied to the Afrikaner Volk. I recognise that only a Volk fighting for its rights has the right to live and that deeds in the form of sacrifice and blood

stamp the character of a Volk as they do that of a human being. In this sense and spirit I declare myself prepared to suffer for my Volk and Fatherland, and if necessary to die. I stand before God and swear this sacred oath, that I as an Afrikaner will faithfully serve my Volk and Fatherland with my whole heart, body and soul and mind along the lines indicated to me by the leader of the National Socialist Rebels, Simon Nel, and no one else from now until death.

"The deep seriousness with which I recognise myself as a National Socialist Rebel finds expression in the blood with which I forever bind my person through the medium of my signature. I am nothing, my Volk is all. God be with us. Raise high the Vierkleur."

Simon Nel pricked Carl's finger with a pin and the red blood followed the pin. Carl dipped a pen in the blood and signed his name.

The ceremony went on . . . drone of voice, red blood flowing, the men as solemn as they would be at a communion. And Carl felt shriven, clean.

"You will keep all the documents that will be kept, and they won't be many," said Simon Nel to Carl.

And next day Carl put the documents with the bloody signatures among the papers in one of the drawers of his desk at the office.

He hungered for action, and it came a few weeks later. The plan was perfect. Carl was in the first of four cars that drove up in the darkness to the Steel Works near Pretoria. Before the guards knew what was happening they were overpowered and robbed of their rifles, bayonets and ammunition. The raiders broke into the dynamite and detonator magazine and loaded cases of dynamite, electric detonators and fuse detonators into the cars. They drove away, took separate roads over the veld. The loot was buried in a cache in the hills.

Reef towns shook with explosions. Alarm spread through the towns. A lonely country store run by a Jew was burnt to the ground one night. A factory in Johannesburg was wrecked.

And one night Julius Theron said to Carl: "I was talking to two C.I.D. men to-night and they were discussing Simon Nel. One said that Nel would fight it out if ever he was cornered. The other said he was all brag and would be taken like a lamb. What do you think?"

"If ever they meet Simon Nel I think there will be many police corpses lying about."

"Do you know him? Have you met him?"

"No."

The newspapers both English and Afrikaans received roneoed copies of statements said to be issued by Simon Nel. They were full of threats. They attacked the English and the Jews. They were Nazi propaganda written by Carl at Simon Nel's dictation. And bombs wrecked shops and factories by night. They blasted buildings in Bloemfontein and on the Reef. And Simon Nel was a will o' the wisp.

In the lonely country stores Jews slept with guns under their pillows.

One grey morning in spring the police surrounded a homestead in the Transvaal hills. Simon Nel was said to be there. Two men bolted. One was shot dead. But at that time Simon Nel was fast asleep in the house of a friend in Pretoria.

And Carl went with him into the lonely Zoutspansberg mountains, and night after night they tried to send messages to Germany. They had with them a wireless expert, who had built a powerful set, but he reported that he had failed. They listened to the German news of the glorious victories in Russia, and they talked as the jackals yapped from the valleys.

Carl sat at the feet of Simon Nel and was lured by his voice and stories of Hitler. "He will come," said Simon Nel, "he will come to set free Afrikanerdom."

They found men in the mountains who were prepared to be disciples of the rebellion. There was plenty of sanctuary. It was easy to fire the lonely mountain men with rebellion. But they went warily like jackals. They heard Zeesen broadcasting about the bombing explosions, and Simon Nel's chest heaved when his name was mentioned as the bravest of all Afrikaners.

Carl spent all his annual leave with Simon Nel. They came back by devious ways and into the hills near Potchefstroom, the old capital of the Transvaal, to the homestead of a farmer parson, a distant relative of Simon. And he gave them sanctuary. He was short, fat, with a bush of white hair. He was Franz van Zyl. Many of Simon Nel's followers came to the homestead that night. Camouflaged telephone calls brought them . . . farmers on the telephone talking about crops and oxen.

Simon, Carl and the predicant were sitting on the stoep. Other men were on guard. And Simon said: "Oom Franz, the church has been preaching the freedom of Afrikanerdom so long, why doesn't it come out into the open now and follow me?"

The predicant's heart warmed towards the big rebel.

"The people are split," said the predicant. "Most of the men of my cloth pray for your success."

"You're not exaggerating, Oom Franz?"

"No."

"If the pulpits of the land thundered the challenge, then the Afrikaners would get out of the war," said Simon.

"Many of them would leave the church," said the predicant.

"In this Godless age many of our own people have lost their reason. The power of the church is not what it was."

"That is because the church has compromised," said Carl speaking for the first time.

"Yes," came the reply, "compromised with the devil."

The sound of a car was heard. The men started. It was a big car.

"Danger," said Franz van Zyl. "I know the sound of every car engine in the district. That is a strange car."

One of the sentries came running up to the stoep. "The car is being driven without lights," he said.

Suddenly it came into the yard. The lights were switched on. It was an armoured car. Armed policemen swarmed out. Simon Nel walked into the light, a revolver in his hand. He thumped his chest.

"Shoot this Afrikaner heart if you must, you'll never take me alive."

Carl was still on the stoep and he felt that his feet were stuck. Franz van Zyl ran down the steps, his hands raised. "Don't shoot," he pleaded, "don't let us have a blood bath. There is a machine gun trained on you."

The police scattered for cover. With a quick succession of shots one of Simon Nel's men smashed the headlights. A sudden darkness. Nel turned and ran. A bullet whistled over his head. Carl sprang to life. He ran after Simon. They ran together down a track through the orchard. They were in the veld. They walked for hours. They came at last to a country road.

They travelled on an ox wagon driven by a lone native. He was taking a load of vegetables to market. In the town it was easy for them to find shelter.

The story flashed through the country. The rebels told one another that Simon Nel had a charmed life. The story of how he had faced the police and bared his breast was exaggerated. It flew from tongue to tongue. It flew to Zeesen and came back over the air. The rebels laughed. The old predicant had saved Simon Nel. There was no machine gun in the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

HUGH and Michael had seen the Germans and the Italians on the run in the Lybian desert and then they themselves had been on the retreat. They were two numbers in the vast ding-dong struggle of the desert. Sometimes they ate sand and flies with their food.

They tasted the terror in the swoop and the dropping bombs of the dive bombers. They scurried like rabbits into their holes. They were in the conquering and loss of tin-pot desert towns where scarcely a whole building stood. They found comradeship with men from all parts of the Empire, and with the men without countries, the Czechs, Greeks, the Poles and the Free French. They found Cairo one sodden drinking and whore shop. They heard free men talking about Russia. Moscow had hurled back the invader.

Hugh would remember that night in a dugout in the desert. With Hugh and Michael there was an Australian, a Cockney and a New Zealander. The Australian said his name was Alf. "Just call

me Alf, you bastards," he said. "This is a war for democracy, and I come from the greatest democracy in the world."

"What about America?" asked Michael quietly.

"Well, yes," conceded Alf. "She's in the war now and she's helping Aussie. Pity though that the Jap bastards struck first. You're a South African. I can see from that there what you call Red Flash." He laughed. "First time I saw it I thought the feller belonged to the Red Army."

"It means that the wearer has taken an oath to serve beyond the borders of South Africa," said the New Zealander. He was called John. "It's funny that."

"Bloody funny," said the Cockney, and he was called Bill.

Hugh flushed. "It's very simple," he said. "Tell me, Bill, what did you think a South African looked like before you met one?"

"Blimey," said Bill, "I thought all South Africans were black."

"But what's the explanation about that there flash?" asked Alf.

Hugh replied: "There are in South Africa two European races, the Afrikaners and the English. They speak distinct languages. Many of them can speak both. They are split politically. Many Afrikaners are against the war, and yet the majority of men in the South African army are Afrikaners. You can separate the South Africans into their two camps in this way . . . the South African British and the loyal Afrikaners who are behind Smuts, and the Afrikaners who call themselves nationalists who are anti-war."

"Why the hell doesn't Smuts shoot the bastards?" asked Alf.

"He'd have to shoot a lot of people," said Hugh.

"But the flash man," said Alf.

"I'm coming to that. There was a Union law which held that no South African should fight beyond the borders of the country. So every man in our army is a volunteer and the volunteers were given the right to take the out-of-Africa oath."

John said: "I see."

"I don't," said Bill. "What if I said I'd fight for London and not for this blinkin' sand heap?"

"I dunno," said Alf. "I wish I had me choice. I'd fight for Aussie. They're bringing the Yanks in to help us. I'd like to go home and meet them bastards the Japs. It's a funny war."

"Look at Michael," said Hugh. "He is a man without a country, but he's fighting for South Africa."

"Wot d'you mean?" asked Bill.

"He's a German Jew," said Hugh. "He came to South Africa, but he hasn't been there long enough to become naturalised. He's got no citizen rights and yet here he is in this war."

"But if he fights then he ought to get those rights at once," said John. "I think New Zealand's the only real democracy in the world."

Michael said: "You know boys why I fight? I hate the Nazi, hate him like poison for what he did to me and my people."

They were silent. Cigarette smoke filled the dugout. They were honest and they could speak their minds.

Alf said: "You're a Jew, perhaps a good Jew. I'm supposed to be a Christian. I'm a bad one. I never pray until I get scared I'm going to die. But I never liked Jews."

"I understand," said Michael. "You've not met many have you?"

"No, not really, 'cept the bloody bookie chaps on the racecourse. They never lose."

And John said: "I never heard of anti-Semitism until Hitler started it."

"And you?" Michael looked across at Bill.

"London's full o' Jews. I've heard folks say the Jews started the war."

"I know," said Michael. "They started the war, the poor devils who were put in concentration camps, who were flogged, shot and murdered. They started the war."

"I never said so mate," said Bill.

"I know," said Michael. "I've said this before . . . Hugh has heard it, but it will stand repeating. You're good fellows, honest-to-God fellows. You have your prejudices. Perhaps they were born in you. Perhaps they were put there by other people. But they are there. My father was taken to a concentration camp. He was a lawyer, a great German-Jewish lawyer, more German than Jewish. He believed in the rights of man. They brought his ashes home to my mother in a casket."

"Christ," said Alf, "I've heard about things like that."

Michael went on: "I'm a Doctor of Philosophy. I taught in a University. I am a philosopher not a soldier . . . but here I am."

"You was a professor or somethin'," said Bill.

"Something like that," interposed Hugh.

"I was a schoolmaster," said John.

"I was one of the workers," said Alf. "Drivin' a truck I was. I don't know nothin' 'bout professors 'cept they wears clean collars and reads books. Gawd, an' you was one o' them."

"I understand," said John, "but surely this time we'll make democracy work."

"Like 'ell it will," said Bill. "Wot abaht them vested interests?"

"What about Russia?" asked Michael.

Alf puffed hard at a new cigarette which he had just rolled. "Ay, that's to the point, cobbors. They said the Reds were no bloody good. Look at 'em."

"What do you know about Russia?" John asked Michael.

"Not much. I've read a great deal about Russia, praise and criticism. But I felt that a people who decided to defy the old world with its rottenness and build a new world couldn't fail. I know that Hitler could never defeat Russia."

"But it's early to say that yet," said John.

"You wait," said Michael.

"Yer know," said Alf, "that Joe Stalin's a shrewd feller."

"What did you think of Russians before Hitler attacked them?" asked Michael.

"I thought they was a bunch of big whiskered crooks."

"Bloody lot o' furriners yer couldn't trust, I thought," said Bill.

And John said : "I thought they were the menace to the peace of the world."

Drone of planes in the sky. They heard the thud of bombs. They heard the planes pass and they went out into the clean night air. The desert was vast.

They crawled back into their shelter. They talked of a million things, about women, about the lands they knew. They talked about the new world and they listened to Michael. It was as if he were back in the lecture room talking to a handful of students. He told them of his belief in the innate greatness of man. He made them for the first time feel that they were not numbers in a vast war machine.

In the morning they separated. They joined their several units. They were advancing. The sky was full of bomber and fighter planes. The dust of the desert whirled around the convoys.

That evening there was a terrific sandstorm. A Springbok convoy halted. The sun was going down. Suddenly a sharp burst of firing at close range, and before the men knew what was happening they were surrounded. They were prisoners. In the night after several hours' travelling they were pushed into a camp near a small village.

Their captors were arrogant. They talked of reaching Cairo in a few weeks. They were young, hard-mouthed men, who strutted. The cruel lines had grown in the corners of young lips. They were the men who were going to rule the world.

Michael whispered to Hugh : "We must get out."

"But a man couldn't get through the barbed wire entanglements," said Hugh.

Michael got to his knees. "I'm going to have a look round. This is my plan. Somehow or other I'm going to get a German uniform, an officer's I hope. I shall come back and I shall take you all out. Don't tell anybody. You'll understand."

Michael disappeared in the night. Hugh waited, his heart pounding. Suddenly he heard a command in German. The guards prodded the sleeping men with the butts of their rifles. An officer wearing a greatcoat was giving orders. Hugh knew that the officer was Michael. The men were bundled into their own trucks. They cursed. They thought they were going to be taken further back beyond the German lines. The convoy threaded its way into the wide desert. The German drivers questioned where they were going. The trucks started. Michael appeared.

A German driver said : "We are going the wrong way, we are going towards the English lines." Michael spoke suddenly in Afrikaans : "Throw yourself on every German driver."

Hugh was ready. He laid his driver low with a blow to the chin.

The men understood at once. The Germans were disarmed. The convoy drove back to the British lines.

Michael was asked to report to his commanding officer. He was told that at the earliest opportunity he would be sent back to South Africa to be trained as an officer.

But he said to Hugh: "I don't want to be an officer. I like the men . . . the common man is the man who will suffer and win this war."

There was a time when lost in the desert they were picked up by a British armoured car. The crew had a German prisoner, a youth called Hans. He had been with them for days.

"He is one of us almost," said the English sergeant. "I thought the Germans were all damned Nazis, but this one is a nice boy."

Michael talked to the boy in his own language. The boy's eyes lit up.

"Why did you join up?" asked Michael.

"Even you, a German Jew, should know that," said the youth. "I had no choice. And in any case I did want to fight for my country."

"I don't suppose," said the English sergeant, "that you can carry on a war without hate. But there's no arrogance or bombast about this lad."

He ate and slept with them. He kept a look-out and warned them at the approach of the enemy. They were on the run and he became one of them, the hunted. They were chasing a German armoured car and he became one with his captors, the hunter. He laughed a lot.

He told Michael that he thought the Germans would win the war, and Michael told him that the British were just as certain that they would win.

"I wish though that it were all over," said the youth. "I don't hate you or these fellows, and you don't hate me. Then what's it all about?"

Here was a youth like some of the youth whom Michael had known before Hitler had changed the history of the world. He was a carpenter in civilian life and came from a village in Saxony. He went to church and was in love with a village maiden . . . "a girl with long flaxen plaits and deep blue eyes." And he said to Michael: "You have seen girls like her a thousand times in the villages of Saxony."

And Michael said: "Didn't the propaganda of the Nazis touch you?"

"It touched me a little," Hans said. "It had to, because there was no other propaganda, and the Nazi propaganda was on night and day. But the village priest was a man I loved. He did not preach openly against the Nazis but he would tell us that all men were mortal and that God was the Father of the world. The Nazis did not like the church. I liked the priest. I knew he was right."

Michael's heart warmed to the German youth. "If you survive

this war," he said, "then go back home and still remember what the old priest told you."

They talked of the Germany they both loved, the lovely old towns, the lovelier land. For Michael knew that he would never forget the land.

The English crew was sorry when Hans had to be handed over. And later Hugh said to Michael: "There must be many more boys like Hans. All Germans are not bad."

"Of course not," said Michael. "There are many like him. But tens of thousands of them had their minds poisoned. He was fortunate in living in a village. In villages life is very close to the little church, close to the church bells, and every day is close to Sunday."

"But you or I," said Hugh, "might have been the instrument to shoot Hans in the heat of battle, or he might have shot us. Say I would have killed him. He would have been just another German to me, a corpse in the desert, a dead man in the sand. And a girl in a German village would weep. Oh, Michael, what is it all about?"

"Just bloody war," said Michael, "war, because the men chosen to rule the people refused to see the danger, because men have made frontiers around their little selves and around their countries. We've just got to see the wretched business through. But there is some hope this time . . . the fighting man is thinking as no fighting man thought before him."

"But Hans would have killed me, or I would have killed him, and it wouldn't have worried the survivor one bit."

Since his outburst at Mogadishu Hugh had put a bridle on his passions. He regretted all he had said and done then. Michael knew that he was ready to break out again. They had been months in the desert, unwashed, unshaven, dirty, louse-ridden. They had become hardened to the heat and to cold. They were at their best in battle. They had no time to think. There was a comradeship in the desert fighting. During the lulls they were bored. They talked politics and they built the new world . . . castles in the sand, but they got bored. They lived in the drone of bomber and the crack of rifle fire and the scream of shells. They were taut like rope, but in the lulls they were like rope dried in the sun, ready to snap. They lived like moles in the desert sometimes for weeks on end. They lived like rats in the smashed houses of the towns along the road skirting the sea. Their minds were alert, their bodies were fit . . . but their souls seemed to be lost. They had seen men go mad suddenly, and strong men crying like babies, like that man who clutched the body of a comrade to his chest and blubbered. They had seen airmen with staring eyes, the light of recognition gone. The man who could not think was the happiest soldier.

"We'll get leave soon," said Michael. "There's only Cairo."

"But there will be people and baths and a man can get rid of this horrible thirst," said Hugh.

They went. They washed the desert from their bodies and from their mouths. They became the prey of harlots. And they did not care. They would go back to the desert and would kill men like that boy Hans, and boys like Hans would perhaps put a bullet through their skulls, and to him they would be two dead Springbok soldiers in the desert . . . two killed for the glory of Adolf Hitler. Sitting in the open saloons, drinking, drinking, leering. Everybody was doing it. Live men who were trying to filch forgetfulness from the awful desert war. It was all so unclean, but it was cleaner than being eaten by the flies of the desert, where bodies rotted in the sun, where wooden crosses were the headstones of the laughing youth of the age.

They asked if Cairo was essential to democracy and argued that it ought to be bombed to the ground. It was a cesspool in which they swam. And they never talked about Magda and Elsebe. They talked about them when the nights were vast in the vast desert.

When they again left Cairo for the fighting lines deep down in their hearts they were glad. Fighting was clean compared with the scramble of life in the fetid streets of the Egyptian city.

CHAPTER XIX

MONTHS had passed since Dirk had returned to the home of his people. He had brought with the loss of his eyes a measure of independence to his people. His pension was two hundred pounds a year with an allowance for a companion. They gave him a picannin called Teboa. And Teboa worshipped him. It was to Teboa that Dirk told all his sorrows. Under the boy's guidance he walked some distance alone. He could feel the smile that the picannin gave him when he succeeded.

Often Dirk sat in the shade on the stoep when summer was at the full. Neighbours would call and everybody would drink coffee and he would tell about the wonders of Abyssinia.

Once when a neighbour said: "Had you not lost your eyes Dirk you would have gone far in the army," Dirk replied: "Maybe I would have come home a sergeant."

There were neighbours who were anti-war, but they also came to pay their respects to the blind man. Politics separated people like mountains separate valleys, but after all Dirk Cilliers was blind, and they came to tell him they were sorry. There was a great compassion in each Afrikaner heart.

He remembered some things which Michael used to say about Russia. His sister, Anna, read him the war news. He listened to the radio. He spoke eloquently about Russia until the pro-war neighbours would say: "Dirk thinks that Hitler will be beaten by Stalin. After all, he should know something, fighting in Abyssinia and all that."

And the anti-war farmers would say: "You see, when a man goes away to fight for Jannie Smuts he turns Russian."

Dirk sat in the sun when the winter came. He wandered the veld he knew. Teboa took him to the Golden Gate and Dirk would lie listening to the laughter of the water. He clutched at memories, and his brown face saddened.

"Tell me how the sky looks, Teboa."

"It is blue, Baas, like the wing of a dove."

"Anything in the sky?"

"Yes, two eagles."

"Their wings outspread and they are gliding."

"Yes, Baas, but how do you know with your eyes gone?"

"I remember. I found a nest of eagles once high in the rocks over there"—and he waved a hand towards the mountains on the other side of the valley. "And the eagles came back and swooped down on me. Lucky I was they didn't peck my eyes out." And then sadly "Perhaps it would have been better had they done so." And then quickly "No, I would have broken my heart and died then. I've lived and fought and I had great men for my comrades and I saw half the world."

"You were a great soldier, Baas."

"I was a happy warrior, Teboa. Jumping over the rocks like a springbok, laughing as I killed men."

"Wasn't it hard to kill men, Baas?"

"No, it was war you see, and if I did not kill the enemy he would have killed me."

Then a sudden anger whipped him. "Why didn't they kill me up there in the mountains where the mists weep, instead of taking my eyes? I am dead because I cannot see."

The little black hand on the big white hand. "Baas, don't say things like that. They hurt my heart. You used to say them often, and now you say them less."

"I know, Teboa, I know."

Magda and Elsebe wrote to him. Anna wrote back for Dirk. Martha Joubert wrote to him and asked him to remember God.

"Teboa."

"Yes, my Baas."

"You are such a little one and I'm so big. And I am leaning on you as if you were a stick."

"I am your stick, my Baas."

"And you are my eyes, picannin."

"I am glad, my Baas."

"Do you know anything about God, Teboa?"

"No, I do go to the little church sometimes. But my father says that God is the God of the white man."

"What?"

"He says that He must be because the black man is a slave."

"Oh."

Dirk inclined his head. "Who's that coming?"

"The predicant."

"Good afternoon, Mynheer Leibbrandt," Dirk said to the little man in black. He could almost see the high-winged collar.

"Good afternoon, Dirk. The last time we met we talked about God. Have you accepted your affliction as the will of God?"

"No."

Dirk knew the little man before he was blinded and he could now sense the sneer on the querulous mouth.

"I told you that God had punished you for going to a war which our people should have refused to serve in. My soul aches when I think of all the young Afrikaners who will die for the British tyrants."

"You know, Mynheer Leibbrandt, that it is no use trying to convert me to that way of thinking."

"You are damned beyond redemption, Dirk Cilliers. I cannot even convert you to God."

"God?" and Dirk laughed. "I asked Teboa there about God just now and he said that his father says that God is the God of the white man."

"The little heathen."

"Don't you call him that. His very name means 'Prayer' and he lives up to it."

"So it's true what I hear, that you have even become a champion of the kaffirs."

Dirk's big hands knotted and unknotted. "What have you heard?"

"I've heard, Dirk Cilliers, that you are shocking your good neighbours when you tell them that the kaffir must also have a place in the South African sun. You say that you saw the black men of other parts of Africa in the fighting line and you say they were brave soldiers. You fool, don't you see that if the black men are armed they will wipe out the whole race. You must know of the great surge of disgust which swept the country when Jannie Smuts said that he would arm the kaffirs."

"He said that he would do that if the Japs ever landed in this country." And Dirk laughed bitterly. "That would be too late. Anyhow the Japs are yellow men."

"The Japanese want the right to claim Asia for the Asiatics."

"Claptrap."

"You dare say that to me."

Dirk was on his feet, his big bulk towering over the little predicant. "Listen, the black men were brave men. I lost my eyes but my eyes were opened before I lost them. I have been learning Braille you know, and I am fingering my way through the New Testament. I have time to think. I never thought at all before I lost my eyes."

"You are damned, Dirk Cilliers."

"And what if I am, Mynheer Leibbrandt? You are not my judge. No, don't go yet."

"I wasn't going."

"Yes you were. I felt that you were going." A slow smile warmed the full lips. "The blind feel, you know. The blind begin to see a man as soon as he talks. And I knew you before I was blind. I don't want to quarrel. In my heart a tremendous struggle is going on. There is a woman in Johannesburg, Martha Joubert, one of us you see . . . a kindly woman whom I never saw when I had my eyes. I have sat in her garden and I have listened to her voice. She tells me that God is my only salvation . . . but her God is the God of the New Testament and not of the Old."

"You will only find your salvation inside the portals of the church, Dirk Cilliers."

"Come then, Teboa, we'll go down to listen to the laughter of the water. The road isn't wide enough for Dirk Cilliers and Mynheer Liebbrandt."

Sitting by the river, thinking. Throwing pebbles into the water and hearing the splash.

"Thank you, Teboa. Run along now. I know my way around the house."

Walking carefully, half listening to the cooing of the doves.

"The predicant called, Dirk."

"Yes Mama."

"Can you find your chair?" She is watching him. "It's wonderful Dirk how you can find your own way. You used to bump into the table."

"Yes." A quiet laugh. "The predicant called."

"He had a long talk with me and your father."

"I know."

His father coughed in the corner. Dirk's head inclined to the corner. He can see his father, a big man wearing a black beard tinged with grey. A hard man.

"I know it's not easy, Dirk." He can feel his father talking with his pipe in his mouth. "But you mustn't make an enemy of the predicant."

"I don't want to make any enemies, Papa."

His father's voice hardens and smites him. "The predicant says that you treat your kaffir guide as a brother."

"And why not, isn't he my eyes, Papa?"

"He is paid for guiding you."

"The allowance is enough to pay for a white man. We pay Teboa the wages of a picannin."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"I have my food, my clothes and my tobacco. You get the money. I do not question your right to that. But I can go away anywhere and live. I speak my mind to anybody. Understand that for the last time." Dirk spoke with finality.

His father cleared his throat. "All right, son. Let's eat."

Then Dirk walked over to his father and took his hand. "I'm sorry, Papa."

"All right Dirk. There's a letter for you from 'Egypt.'"

"From Hugh?"

"Yes, Anna says it's his writing."

"Call her, Mama."

And Anna read: "Often in the desert Michael and I talk of you and hope you are well. The war lost much of its glamour when that accident happened to you. Sometimes I am afraid that I shall lose Michael, and sometimes I know he is worried at the thought that I might go out first. Pray for us a little. We want to come home and talk with you in the sun of the old Free State, swap memories, but only the best ones, and the best one of course was when Dannie Pienaar sat with us and drank coffee under the mountains at Dessie. Remember?"

And Dirk's face was full of light as he told them for the thousandth time of Dannie Pienaar the beloved Springbok general. "He was one of us, just one of us boys."

Long after the family had gone to bed he sat alone on the stoep smoking his pipe. It was a night of the full moon. He could feel the moonlight. From down the valley the revelry of the natives at a beer drink came to him, the rhythm of the dance, the voices raised in song. An owl hooted and from the mountain a night-jar churred. The night was alive with the calling of frogs.

Oh God, why did you blind me? Couldn't You have taken one eye or an arm or a leg? It is a night for love. I would go riding, riding over the mountain. Somewhere a girl would be waiting and I would crush her to me and I would find my tongue saying things that come easily at such times. And I would be satisfied riding home with the flame of her white body within me. God, my God.

It may be true what the predicant told me to-day. I never gave You a thought in the lust of my manhood, never a thought. I was cruel when the eyes of the girls drooped before the fire in my eyes. I laughed when they said I was breaking their hearts.

They were of the earth, of the veld, golden like it, and they were always my harvest. But there was never any thanksgiving in my heart.

Memories of Abyssinia came. He remembered how the wine warmed him, the Italian women, lithe, lustrous-eyed. It was true, perhaps, that he had lost his soul. He had killed men with no more thought than the killing of jackals. Then he had got drunk and then he had slept with Italian women. His loins shook with the memories. He remembered them all, from the sea to the mountains . . . he had lusted in his strength.

Oh God, my God, You made me lustier than most of your creatures and the sun of my country made my blood hot, and I was a young stallion. It's no use denying it . . . I would do everything I did then again, if I hadn't lost my eyes.

And then it came as it always came . . . the face of the Italian on the slopes of Amba Alagi, the maniacal laugh, the mad eyes. Dirk threw his hands up to his face and stifled a scream. Then he wept quietly.

Oh God, my God, why couldn't You have left me my eyes?

It was good to cry alone. The great loneliness of the veld around him. The kaffirs singing their old war songs far down the valley. The love songs of the crickets . . . and the night swooning with the full moon. Let the world of your neighbours see you smiling in the daytime. That is well. Cry alone in the night with no one to see, no one to hear. Break your heart on the stone of yourself. Fill your pipe, Dirk Cilliers, and it will dry your tears and warm your heart, and in the twirling smoke you cannot see you can still conjure a picture.

He lit his pipe. The bowl warmed. There was comfort in the clench of his teeth on the stem. He fondled the bowl . . . he rubbed it against his broad nose. He could feel the shine of the bowl. He could feel the smoke wreaths, see the pictures, and one picture remained as it always did . . . the face of Magda. Deep, dark eyes like the little pools in the cavern up there on the mountain, body like the cascade that falls in the little river, warm hands, red lips and the rich smile. Like the moon he could feel and never see again, like the moon he could never touch. He clutched the dream and it was good, and all the horror of Amba Alagi was a forgotten nightmare. The great silence came over his world. A jackal barked from a far mountain. He shuffled to his room.

"Are you all right, Dirk?" The voice of his mother.

"Yes, Mama, you mustn't keep awake always until I turn in."

"All right Dirk. Good night."

"Good night Mama."

Next day he and Teboa were walking along the dirt road which led from the farm to the main road when they stepped aside for a car coming up the road. The car stopped.

"Hello, Dirk," said a voice he knew. "Who do you think I am?"

"Hugh's father."

"Yes, my wife and I are staying in the district. We're going home to-morrow so we thought we'd call on you."

When Dirk got into the car Mrs. Wayne said: "You look well."

"I'm very well," he said. He wished again that he could talk like Michael.

They drove to the house, sat on the stoep and had coffee. His mother did her best with her broken English. All the time he was uneasy with Mrs. Wayne. He could feel that she was also uneasy. She was looking at his mother and his family, looking at the poor house, such a contrast to her rich home in Johannesburg.

Hands were shaken. There was an invitation from Philip Wayne to Dirk to come to Johannesburg and stay with them whenever he felt like it, and Dirk said: "Thank you . . . but I like being here."

They went and Dirk was conscious that they belonged to a different world. He never hungered for their world. He had never thought much about inequalities. He had heard the politicians talk. He had heard men in the army talking about it . . . but if he only had his eyes he would still be a farmer, a little farmer fighting a losing battle, perhaps, in the mighty veld.

When they were a good way from the house Joan Wayne shuddered. "I suppose, Philip, those are the people who are called poor whites."

"There are poorer whites, but they are poor whites," he replied.

"What a hovel . . . I'd die if I had to live in a place like that."

"Yes, dear."

"Dirk has a good pension," she said. "Why does he choose to live there?"

"It's the home of his people," he said, "and I take it that men like to be with their people."

He was a little irritated because he had sensed that Dirk had been conscious all the time of the affected superiority of Joan as she talked to his mother.

"To think that Dirk Cilliers lost his eyes when his country couldn't give his people a better home than that," he said.

"Please, Philip," she said, "you're getting quite sentimental about the poor."

He was silent.

CHAPTER XX

THE men were sitting in a circle by a blue-gum plantation near a farm in a valley between Johannesburg and Pretoria. Simon Nel had spent a few days in hiding on the farm and had again called his inner circle together. The moon rode through fleecy white clouds and the veld was a whispering lake of silver.

Simon Nel stood within the circle. His voice rasped. "We are not moving fast enough, comrades. The bombing of Jew shops isn't enough. We must do something dramatic."

The men grunted their approval. Carl was staring through the waving hands of Simon at the moon. He came suddenly back to earth as Simon Nel went on. "I'm going to give orders for the blowing up of a troop train." There was a dead silence. "Don't you approve?" he challenged.

Petrus, a fair-haired youth with even teeth said: "We shall do what the leader orders."

"That's better," said Simon Nel. "I shall want three men. I choose one myself, my lieutenant, Carl Joubert. He will take the two men who will blow up the train, to the rendezvous."

Carl started, but found his tongue and his tone was even. "I shall take them."

"Who will be the two to blow the troops to hell?"

Two youths jumped up. Others followed. "I shall take the first two, they did not hesitate, Petrus and Bartel are chosen," said Simon Nel. They could see the fire in his eyes in the moonlight.

"Petrus and Bartel," he said, "you are worthy rebels. I am proud of you, Boers in blood and bone. If you are caught the Government will hang you. That is the risk. But I know you are not afraid to die. You will not fail."

"No," said Petrus.

"We shall blow the train to hell," said Bartel.

Simon Nel's teeth shone in the moonlight. "When the train goes up its crash will be heard from the Limpopo to the Cape. It will startle the damned English and the wretched Afrikaners who have sold their souls in the market place. The railway line will be a heap of the mangled corpses of men who will never go to the war. Alas, there will be Afrikaners among them, fine, sturdy youths whose minds have been poisoned . . . but they must die, for that is part of the plan." It seemed that he would talk for a long time, for Simon Nel liked to talk, but he stopped suddenly and said: "That's all. You will all be silent. I will plan the final details with Carl and the two boys."

The men gave the salute and vanished in the veld to their cars. The cars took different road tracks. The churring died in the distance. Then Simon Nel said: "You know, Carl, the railway line that runs from Pretoria to the military camps?"

Carl nodded.

"There are two roads, one a dirt track on the left, the other a macadam road on which the army lorries travel. You will drive on the dirt road, the lonely road. Petrus and Bartel have been fully trained in firing dynamite. The line must be blown up at 8.43 on Sunday night. A few minutes later the train will come."

Carl nodded again. He saw the excitement in the faces of the boys. He said: "The line will be blown up."

"Good," said Simon Nel. "I'm staying to-night on the farm. Good night," They saluted him and watched him stride across the veld. Carl took Petrus and Bartel back to Pretoria and arranged to meet them in the town on Sunday evening. He would bring them dynamite and the charges in his own car.

He drove slowly along the Pretoria Road in the moonlight. There was a stone of fear in his heart. He had wanted to speak, but his tongue had been glued to the roof of his mouth. What if he had spoken? Nel's big fist would have crashed into his face perhaps. He had seen him fell a man with a blow and the man had dropped like a stunned ox. There was a man who had disappeared. He had been lured from his home in the dead of night and had never been seen again. The man had been suspected of having given information to the police.

Carl stopped the car by the roadside under a clump of fir trees. He lit a cigarette and drew the smoke deep into his lungs. Petrus

and Bartel were so very young. It would not have been so terrible if Simon had chosen two of the big miners. But the two youths, Petrus fair-haired and blue-eyed with the warm, sunny face . . . just out of University with a science degree, and Bartel . . . he was a teacher. They had practised with dynamite and with guns. They were eager and learned quickly. Still, if only Simon had chosen expert miners.

He stared at the pattern of shadow and moonlight on the road. It was all so delicate. He finished the cigarette quickly and lit another. His nerves were easier now. He drove on and put on speed. As he approached Johannesburg he had a longing to go home, but he stifled it. He went to his flat and immediately to bed. But he could not sleep. As he dozed off he would suddenly awake with a start. He got out of bed and sat by the open window in his pyjamas, smoking. The life of the city was still. The natives came to wash down the streets. There was comfort in the mighty surge of water. The natives were laughing. They were always laughing.

A doubt wormed into his mind . . . would the revolution ever come? He dozed again and awakened with a start . . . screech of brakes, a train tumbling, the mad screaming of the trapped soldiers. He went back to bed and murmured to himself some old Boer poems. He slept.

Elsebe was surprised to see him outside the school on the following afternoon. He looked ill and her heart went out to him quickly.

"What's the matter, Carl?" she asked.

"Didn't sleep well," he said. "I've come to take you to tea."

"That's nice of you, but don't you think it would be better if you took me home to tea. Mother is longing to see you."

"No," he said, "we'll drive to the Zoo."

They sat in the open-air kiosk, drank strong tea and ate scones and cream. They looked down on the sweeping lawns and the gardens. They heard the chatter, chitter and squawk of the birds in the cages. Children played on the lawns.

"What is worrying you, Carl?"

"Nothing," he said.

"You are worried."

"Couldn't sleep last night."

"Your room is empty at home and it is quiet. Come home, Carl."

His lips drooped. "I'm not defeated," he said. "I just wanted to see you." He looked into her face, egg-shell brown with the big, warm eyes, the soft hair. He smiled. "If you weren't my sister I would fall in love with you," he said.

She smiled back at him. "That's the nicest thing you have ever said to me, Carl. But if your heart is hurt there is only one person in the world who can ease it and that's mother."

"How is she?"

"Well, but her soul is sad."

"Tell her," he said, "I'll come home when I can. I am a bit tired."

"You look tired to death."

"It isn't as bad as that yet," he said. "Well, let's go." He drove her to the corner of the street in Rossmore, but he would not go in to see his mother. "Tell her," he said again, "that I'll come on Sunday night—about ten o'clock."

When Elsebe walked in to the house her mother looked up. "What's the matter, Elsebe?" she asked. "Had a tiring day at school?"

"Yes, Mama."

"But there's something else."

"I've seen Carl. He says he will be home on Sunday night."

"I couldn't sleep last night for thinking of him," said Martha.

"He said he had had a sleepless night, too."

Martha went to her room and fell on her knees. "Dear God," she said, "You know that the crisis is coming. Help my Carl." She then went to the kitchen and asked Mary to make tea. She and Elsebe sat on the stoep.

"Oh, Mama," said Elsebe, "where do you get your calm from?"

"I just went into my room and said a few words to God."

"Does He listen to you?"

"I know He does. I must go and see Carl to-morrow."

Next day she found Carl in his office. She hid the thrashing of her heart. She saw his lips tighten.

"I was doing some shopping," she said, "and I haven't seen you for a long time."

"I'm all right," he said.

"You said you would be home on Sunday."

"I'll try."

"Why don't you come in the morning and spend the whole day?"

His eyes shifted. "I can't do that."

"Oh, Carl, don't do it."

He swung round. "What?"

"Don't do it whatever it is, my dear."

She went away quietly. He sat with hunched shoulders. The telephone rang and he leapt to life. "Yes?"

He recognised the voice and involuntarily stiffened. "The article must be good," the voice said, "even to the last detail, even to the punctuation."

"It shall be," said Carl.

That night he went to the cinema alone. There was the inevitable picture in the African Mirror of Smuts reviewing troops. He closed his eyes. The main picture was an American gangster film. The gangsters were all roped in at the close. He felt like a gangster. He fumbled through sleep and through the next day. He was like a man waiting for the sound of a shot to start the race.

The evening came full of a glorious sunset. Along the Pretoria Road Johannesburgers were coming home in a cavalcade of cars. They had been out in the sun all day . . . they invariably made it a Sun Day. He drove into Pretoria. The lights were on the streets.

In a back street Petrus and Bartel were waiting. He idled with the lights of the car out along the dirt track by the railway line. He got out and put false number plates over the car number plates. From the boot of the car he took the charges. The big moon came up over a little koppie. The three were standing now by the car. In the light of the moon he looked at them. Their faces were taut.

"Are you all right, boys?"

There was a shiver in the voice of Petrus as he replied: "Y-yes. I'm all right."

"We must do it," said Bartel. But his voice was uneasy.

Carl could feel their hands trembling as they took the dynamite from him. "I'm sorry," he said, "I'd gladly let you back out of this had I the power."

"We took the oath with our blood," said Bartel. Young and dark, so very young, Carl thought as he looked at him. A young soldier of the rebellion. And how fair Petrus was. A slight wind ruffled the light hair.

"Where the rails loop," said Carl, "that's where you put the charge." Suddenly he felt icy cold. He looked at the dial of his watch. "Now," he said in a hollow voice.

They left him. They stooped as they ran. He could hear their shoes crunching on the gravel on the side of the rail track. The moon was under a cloud. Quick, before the moon runs out of the cloud. For the sake of Christ, quick. He was trembling now from head to foot. His teeth chattered. Were the boys afraid, too? Were their teeth chattering like his, were their hands trembling? No, no . . . anything might happen if their hands trembled. "Don't do it whatever it is, my son."

Two explosions shattered the air simultaneously. He saw the rails flying. Then all was quiet like death. Death? Yes, like death.

"Petrus," he called. "Bartel." Silence filled the world. He ran to the line. "Petrus . . . Bartel," he choked. He kicked something. He stooped and picked it up . . . a shoe with a foot in it. He ran round . . . he saw Bartel and Petrus . . . bits of them scattered about. And the moon came out from under the cloud, and there was blood on the rails. Armless and legless, stripped of all its clothes, one body lay across a rail, white and bloody in the moonlight. A face stripped of all flesh grinned at him gap-toothed. He ran to the car. Another car came swinging down the road, its lights full on. He switched on his lights. The car stopped.

A man leaned out of the window. "Did you hear an explosion?" he asked in Afrikaans.

"Yes," said Carl. "I stopped to investigate but couldn't find anything."

"It's Simon Nel's gang," said the man. "Troop trains use this line. I'm sure I heard an explosion." He got out of his car. "I'll stop the train."

● "I'd better fetch the police," said Carl.

"Yes," said the man.

Carl swung round and drove down the road. He slipped over a crossing. He took a dirt track away from the main road. He took off the false number plates. Then he walked into the veld and threw them into some tall grass. He drove on. He swung from track to track, feeling that in time he would come to another main road. He drove gingerly with his lights out. He was sweating and his heart was pounding. After hours it seemed he saw the lights of Pretoria. He drove in boldly but kept to the streets to the west of the town. He got into a stream of cars at a robot. He felt safe. He swung into the Johannesburg Road and there was a cavalcade of cars coming and going. He drove leisurely. The sweat dried on his face. As he drove he lit a cigarette.

He wanted to pull up but he was afraid. He would go home to his mother now. A great relief came when he saw the lights of Johannesburg in the distance. He saw the speedometer flash to sixty and let his foot rest on the accelerator. When he reached the outskirts of the town he slowed down to thirty. Lights, lights and life. No death in the moonlight. His mouth was parched. His mother would give him coffee. He stopped at last in Empire Road. It was full of lights. All the agony of the end of Petrus and Bartel swept down on him and he wept.

"God, my God, I didn't mean it to end that way." His hands flew up to his eyes and then he looked at his hands and there was blood on it. Blood from the foot in the shoe.

He drove home. As he entered the drive the door opened and he saw his mother framed in the doorway.

He staggered out of the car. With a cry she came running to him. "Carl, Carl." She pulled him to her.

Then his father and Elsebe came. Now he was sitting in a chair. His face was drained of blood. The coffee was good. How thirsty he was. Yes, more, more, a hundred cups of coffee, mother.

"Have a cigarette Carl?"

"Yes, Papa."

"Here is a light, Carl."

"Thanks, Elsebe. Let's sit on the stoep in the moonlight."

The terrible thirst had gone. Tired to death. The moon sailing on up there . . . the moon saw everything. The white faces of his people looking into his white face in the moonlight, waiting for him to talk. He must not talk, never, never.

"What has happened, Carl?"

"Mother, I've come home."

"I'm glad, Carl."

He looked suspiciously at her. "You told me not to do it, whatever it was. Did you know what it was?" His eyes bored into her.

"No," she said. "I was troubled in my heart."

"I've often thought you had the gift of second sight, Mama."

"I have only the sight that God has blessed me with," she said.

"I would be killed as a traitor if I talked," Carl said suddenly.

"By Simon Nel," said his father.

"By Simon Nel, Papa."

They did not probe. They let him smoke. Now and again he stared at his hand. Suddenly he remembered something. "I must get the papers," he said.

He went out to the car. They followed and Martha said to Piet and Elsebe: "Just let him do what he likes." Reaching the car she said: "Can we come with you?"

"Yes," he said.

He drove to his office and was back soon. In the garden he went to the pit in the corner where all the refuse was thrown to make compost. He emptied the case of a bundle of papers. He set them alight. The four of them stood watching the papers burn into ash.

"More coffee, Mama," he said.

Back on the stoep he talked rapidly. "They are dead in the moonlight, Petrus and Bartel. Bits and pieces of them, a foot in a shoe, a body without arms and legs . . . a grinning face, rags of flesh, rags of clothes scattered all about the place. Two young ardent soldiers of the rebellion, bloody in the moonlight, a slaughter-house in the moonlight. I tell you they were lovely looking lads with bright eyes and stout hearts . . . and they're there in bits and pieces in the moonlight."

They gaped, listening.

"I was afraid of it all from the time that Simon Nel chose Petrus and Bartel to blow up the railway lines over which the troop train would be travelling this night . . . but sworn an oath I had, signed with my own blood, and so had they. The poor little boys out there in the moonlight. We stood together and I gave them the charges and they trembled as they took them, and I saw their frightened eyes. I shivered as if ice were running down my back." His voice sunk to a whisper. "But they didn't come back and I went to look for them . . . and I picked up a shoe, and the shoe had a bloody foot in it . . . and the blood trickled down my hand. Oh God, forgive me, forgive me."

He slumped forward and his father caught him. Martha and Elsebe were on their knees. He shook his head like a terrier coming out of water. Again his brain cleared.

"Don't talk any more," said Martha.

They helped him to his room. He stared around, remembering little things. Some of his books on the shelf. His mother had prepared it to look just as he had left it many months before. Months? Years. He had wandered in strange places and hearkened to strange voices and he had signed an oath with his own blood . . . and he had sent two boys to their death in the moonlight. Oh God, cover the moon with clouds for-ever. Let me never see the moon again.

The telephone rang through the house. He jumped up from the bed as if the ring were a shot. His mother went to the telephone.

He opened his ears wide to catch what she was saying far up the passage. He was only half conscious that his father and Elsebe were in the room. His mother came back.

"Who was it," he asked.

"Somebody for you, Carl. I lied when I said you were not here. Whoever it was said that the article was bad because the punctuation was all wrong."

"That was Simon Nel," he said.

She sat in the dark room. She heard him slip into sleep. Then she tiptoed to her own room, lay in her clothes on the bed and wept quietly.

CHAPTER XXI

MARTHA did not sleep. She could hear Carl tossing and groaning in his sleep, and once when he screamed she went to his bedside. Piet was at her heels and Elsebe ran in from her room. Martha had switched on the light. Carl was sitting up in bed, white.

"Oh, Mama," he said, "I just can't get the boys out of my mind. Bits and pieces in the moonlight. It must have been a judgment. I wouldn't listen to you."

Martha motioned Piet and Elsebe away, whispering: "I'll sit in the dark with him, please go and rest."

They went. There was just nothing they could do. Piet switched off the light as he returned to his room. He walked across to the window and flung the curtains apart. The world was still full of moonlight. He was conscious in spite of Carl's condition of redemption for his son.

Elsebe, before she got back into bed, also looked out on the night. She was afraid for Carl.

Now Carl wanted to forget . . . but could a man ever forget a bloody spectacle such as he had seen? He was a rebel, but his rebellion was made up of the stuff of dreams. Realism had come in and stripped him.

Kneeling by Carl's bed in the dark, Martha held his hand. "I'm sorry for it all, Mama," he said. "I should have refused to take the boys to do such a dreadful thing."

"You should have refused," she said.

"Oh, I wanted to. They were so young . . . I saw it was wrong when Simon gave the order in the veld that night. I wanted to talk but I was afraid."

"I know."

"I swore an oath and signed it with my blood . . . I was afraid. Surely it was a judgment."

"Of God," she said. "Evil has only one reward—evil."

She pressed his hand. "But you will sleep now. You can't go back to work for a long time. You have almost burnt yourself out."

"I'm deadly tired."

It was the comfort of her presence that lulled him and she felt him relax. She heard his even breathing and took her hand away. She prayed silently for a long time. She felt that Carl was doomed, but she wanted to fight for him. She bit her lips to stem her tears.

When she got to her room Piet said, "You could always put the child to sleep, Martha."

"Always, in the days when he trusted me," she said.

"I've been thinking," said Piet, "that he will not want to go back to the rebels."

"He will never go back," she said.

In the morning the story of the bodies being found on the railway line and the nick-of-time stopping of the troop train, was in the newspapers. The bodies were unrecognisable, the reports said, but the police were convinced that the men belonged to the Simon Nel saboteurs.

Martha made Carl stay in bed and called in the family doctor. Carl was still shaken from his experience. He had never been robust. Now his mind was in a ferment. He looked haggard. Doctor van Nieberk said bluntly that he must take a long rest, otherwise he might contract tuberculosis.

"I will take a rest," said Carl.

Martha rang up the Editor of *Die Brand* and told him that Carl was sick. She said that her son must obey the doctor's order. She had his things brought from the town flat, arranged his books and put him to rest in the garden framed with gums.

"Write poetry here," she said.

"The spirit has gone," said Carl.

"Write about the things that are eternal, the hills and the skies," she said.

Carl read all the newspapers. Two mothers had identified the bodies found on the railway. Alarmed by the attempt to blow up the troop train the people clamoured for action against the saboteurs. Government spokesmen replied that already the sentence for sabotage was death. A mass meeting was held at the Johannesburg City Hall. The meeting demanded action. The Government interned a large number of people. The Minister of Justice announced that the arrest of Simon Nel was imminent.

Joan Wayne went to the mass meeting. "The people won't stand for this nonsense," she said to Philip. "You should have heard the speakers, M.P.s and all. They said that unless that Nel rebel was caught we wouldn't be able to sleep safely in our beds. And do you know what Miriam Munro told me as we were coming home in the car?"

"Something very funny, if I know Mrs. Munro."

"She said that if Nel were caught, tried and found guilty the Government would probably let him off and give him a farm. Do you think the Government would do anything so silly?"

He laughed. "How should I know? The Government does some queer things."

Mary the maid at the Jouberts was curious about the home-coming of Carl, and she had another meeting with Nicodemus.

"Baas Carl looks all frightened," she said. "He was a rebel."

"With the man named Simon Nel, that Dutchman?" asked Nic.

"I've heard the name of Simon Nel mentioned."

"And the little missus, my Basie's girl?"

"She's full of concern about her brother. And the old missus, you should see her watching her son, as if he were a lamb going to the slaughter."

"Poor sheep," said Nicodemus. "She's good to you isn't she?"

"She's worth all the gold of the Rand."

Next day Nic approached his master as he was getting into the car. "Heard from Basie, master?" he asked.

"No, Nic, but you asked me yesterday,"

"It's a new day isn't it, master?"

"Yes, but what's on your mind?"

Nicodemus fidgeted. "How's Basie's girl?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her for weeks. Why?"

Nicodemus looked around furtively. "Well," he said. "Her brother you know, he's at home."

"I see," said his master. "Don't you say anything to anybody else."

"No," said Nicodemus.

On his way home that evening Philip Wayne went to the Jouberts. He saw that Carl's mother was fearful as soon as she saw him. He noticed Carl start.

"I'm glad you're home," he said.

Carl bridled. "What on earth have you to do with my affairs, Mr. Wayne?"

Philip Wayne was blunt. "Perhaps your mother hasn't told you but my son Hugh, my only son who is fighting in the Western Desert, is fond of your sister."

Carl understood many things then. "I see," he said. "You are rather afraid that if your son knew Elsebe's brother that would hurt him?"

Philip Wayne did not answer the question. He said: "Have you finished with your fantastic ideas?"

"I have finished," said Carl.

Martha took Philip Wayne to the door. "Please don't do anything, Mr. Wayne," she said. "You seem to know a great deal although I know that Elsebe has not seen you lately."

"What I know is a theory, that's all, Mrs. Joubert. And I keep my theories to myself."

"Thank you," she said.

When Martha returned Carl looked peeved. "All the time my sister was in love with an English soldier," he said, and he did not attempt to hide the bitter tone in his voice.

"A South African soldier," said his mother. "Don't you see how very hard it was for her?"

"I don't."

"Perhaps you will. But why are we quarrelling, we who love each other so much?"

"I'm sorry, Mama. I am bored; I want to get back to work."

"They'll be watching for you. The mysterious telephone calls should warn you."

His eyes hardened. "Sometimes I think that I would be better dead."

When his father came home he asked: "Anything in the evening paper? Have they caught Simon Nel yet?"

"No," said his father.

"They'll never catch Simon, he's too clever."

At dinner he said casually to Elsebe: "I saw your prospective father-in-law to-day, Mr. Philip Wayne, the great lawyer."

Elsebe flushed. "He probably gave you some good advice, Carl," she said.

"He did once at your behest," he said.

"Why didn't you take it?"

"Because I was stubborn." He caught the looks which flashed from the eyes of the women. "I feel that no matter what I do now I am damned."

"You'll write great things yet, Carl," said his father.

"The fire has gone out of me," replied Carl.

The telephone rang and they all jumped. Every evening the telephone rang many times. The speakers never gave their names. They said: "You traitor, Carl Joubert, you are a marked man," and "tell that jackal that the bullet of vengeance is coming his way," and "the souls of Petrus and Bartel will greet you across the grave." Sometimes one word was used, sometimes filthy words, and always the speaker put down the receiver before any reply could be made.

The telephone went on ringing. It was Magda calling Elsebe.

Christmas Eve came and Johannesburg prepared for a rollicking festive season. The shops had never taken so much money, the city streets had never seen such crowds of shoppers.

Simon Nel, with three of his bodyguard, was driving out of Johannesburg on to the Pretoria Road. He had no fears. That night in Pretoria lots would be drawn among his men . . . and a man would be chosen to shoot the traitor, Carl Joubert. The city was left behind and the car sped along the open road. It passed the hugger-mugger native township of Alexandra.

The car passed under an avenue of trees, downhill, uphill and again downhill. The road led to a bridge over which there were narrow, one-way tracks. As the car sped towards it the driver had to jam on his brakes . . . there was a big car across the road. Suddenly plain-clothes detectives swarmed in from the roadside. Before they could realise what had happened Simon Nel and his

men were pulled out. They were searched for arms and a revolver was taken from Nel. His hands were manacled. He stood in the roadway like a big bull, his head down, the sweat pouring from his face. He cried out: "Why didn't you shoot? Why didn't you shoot?"

He was bundled into the police car and taken to police headquarters. The police surrounded him. He raised his head and his eyes were bloodshot. He cried out: "Oh, what will Adolf Hitler say when he learns that his disciple fell like a lamb? Why didn't you shoot this Afrikaner heart?" He stared at the police. He raised his fettered hands and charged at a detective. The police bore him to the ground and he was dragged off to a cell, crying like a baby.

Julius Theron got the story. When he returned to the office he rang up Carl. "Remember how we once talked about the possible capture of Simon Nel?" he said. "He was caught to-night and submitted like a lamb."

"No," said Carl. "It couldn't have happened."

"It did happen," said Julius. "And then he went all hysterical at police headquarters."

When Carl returned to his family they saw that he was bewildered. He sat limply in his chair. "I can't believe it," he said.

"What?" asked his mother gently.

"That was Julius," said Carl. "He says that Simon Nel was captured to-night and that he submitted like a lamb. And he said something about Simon being hysterical like a woman."

"I thought he would have killed all the police," said Piet.

Carl looked up. "I thought so too," he said.

"What good would that have done?" asked Martha. "Hasn't the man enough crime to answer for already?"

"Well, we've all spoken except Elsebe," said Carl. "What do you think, Sis?"

"I think the man is a bully," she said bluntly.

Carl squirmed a little. "He was as strong as a bull," he said. "His eyes burned . . . his voice went through you and set your heart singing. You got the indelible impression that the man was a leader, and I know that not one of his men questioned his courage. What will they do with him now?"

No one answered him. "They'll put him on trial, they'll hang him, make a martyr of him, and every man who followed him will remember. They will spill his blood and make bad blood . . ." He looked across at Elsebe. "Don't frown so," he said. "You did not know him, he was a big man."

She suddenly flared into anger. "A big man who sent boys to do his dirty work and get blown to pieces on the railway line . . ."

"Stop, Elsebe," the words came from Martha like shots. And whatever Elsebe was going to say was left unsaid. Martha turned to Carl.

"Simon Nel can't harm you any more," she said. "That's the thing to be thankful for."

"He will always haunt me," he said. "I thought that the cause was the greatest thing in the world and that no mercy should be shown to the enemies of the cause. I saw him hit one of the men who questioned his decision, and the man dropped like a log. Perhaps I was afraid of him."

"Yes, of his physical strength," said Martha.

"One night when I answered the 'phone I recognised his voice. I'll tell you something now which I never told anyone. It was *his* voice . . . the other night. He said that on Christmas Eve his men would draw lots to kill the traitor, Carl Joubert. He said that I was to die on Christmas Day. But he never got to the drawing of the lots."

Piet asked in panic-stricken voice: "But perhaps his men did draw lots?"

"No," said Carl, "nothing was ever done without Simon Nel dramatising it. I was his confidant . . . but he never discussed things with me even beforehand. He would call a meeting and then, without warning of any kind he would make some breath-taking announcement. He wanted to dramatise the sentence of death which he was to have passed on me to-night."

Elsebe went over to Carl. "Ouboe," she said, "were you afraid?"

"Yes I was afraid," he replied. "When you were asleep to-night I was going to creep out. I was going to give myself up to Simon Nel. I know I could have found him at one of a dozen or more places. I was going on the trek to my death. I was afraid, but I was going . . . because Simon Nel seemed to dominate my soul."

"Now you are free," said Elsebe.

"I don't know," said Carl.

CHAPTER XXII

NEITHER Hugh nor Michael could tell how they survived the terrific battle of Sidi Rezegh where the Springboks fought tanks with rifles. The armies of the Empire had swept on in a big advance through the dead towns and across the desert. In action all the boredom, tiredness and hate for war vanished. Something to do, something to win, even though it were only a wadi or stretch of sand . . . that was achievement. The sky was alive with fighting planes and bombers, the desert was alive with the voice of guns, the rumble of tanks, the smooth running of armoured cars on sand. And the sand blew in clouds, or it was dead quiet. Men ate rarely and hunger gnawed at their vitals and gave them blinding headaches . . . but all that passed. They fought on through the cold nights, and sometimes it rained. They fought in the brazen heat of the day. They forget everything except that they were fighting machines and in

their hearts was a cold hate for the enemy, for the enemy kept them in the desert, kept them in the war which they had not sought.

Battles in the swirling sand and their eyes were choked with grit. Their mouths were dry and burning and the sand bit into their lips and chapped them. Their beards grew. The caked sweat dried on hard bodies. They lived and fought like animals. They went on to the last ounce of their strength. Hunger and fighting and little sleep, they were lost souls in the battles of the damned.

And then came Sidi Rezegh. Suddenly as if out of nowhere, in the dawn came the German tanks . . . and the Springboks stood up to them with rifles. A man ran screaming towards a tank, flung hand grenades into it and died as the tank blew up. Men against machines, men mowed down when their ammunition ran out.

Hugh remembered throwing himself on to the sand; he scooped the sand around him. He lay inert. The tanks passed near him, almost over him. He saw a man dying a few yards away. He saw a Bantu stretcher-bearer coming to him. He heard the black man say: "Baas, are you very hurt? I'll take care of you." Another stretcher-bearer came. They bandaged the man's wounds. The man was crying out: "Christ is black. Dear Christ. Christ is black."

Hugh remembered that his ear-drums were splitting. He rose from the sand with his empty rifle. The tanks had passed. He wandered in a cloud of sand. He ran, and he did not know which way he was running. He staggered now as he walked. And the clouds of sand lifted and he saw many of his fellows. They walked all day and in the evening they saw a lorry coming towards them. They were ready to give in, but it was one of their own.

They joined the great retreat. They heard that Tobruk had fallen and that the Second South African Division had been captured. Their hearts were in their boots. Long lines of lorries, of cars, of guns, all going towards Egypt. The men watched the skies, waiting for the Luftwaffe. The cavalcade stretched for miles. If the Luftwaffe came the long, sinuous, retreating convoy would be bombed off the face of the earth. Bonnet to tail the great retreat was on through the night. On through the next day, and still the Luftwaffe did not come. British fighting planes watching the enemy. The R.A.F. would fight as it did in the Battle of Britain. But surely it would be outnumbered. The Germans never came.

The retreat stopped at El Alamein, where the blinding white sand dunes ran along the coast, where the sea was a shrilly blue. On the other side was the Quattara Depression which would defy the crossing of any army. There was the Hill of Jesus to the left. There on the coastal road was the little railway station, a heap of ruins. But there were foxholes where tired men could sleep. There were fortifications where men could fight with their backs to the

wall. El Alamein was the gateway to Egypt and the Nile. Deep down in his heart every soldier vowed that Rommel would not pass.

Cairo was in a panic. The great evacuation had begun. The rich Egyptians and the rich foreigners were already moving. The poor were beginning to trek away with all their meagre belongings in carts. Cairo would be empty, a dead town in a few weeks.

It was many days after he got back to El Alamein that Hugh found Michael. He had asked for him everywhere. He turned up with one of the last convoys that had escaped the claws of the Nazis

"God," said Hugh, "it is good to see you Michael."

"And you, my dear Hugh," said Michael. "My heart was beginning to mourn."

Night and day they had to be on the alert. The Stukas came by day and they came by night and from their foxholes Hugh and Michael heard the thud-thud of the bombs. They laid mines, they carried sandbags. They were continually being told of orders and counter-orders. They heard General Dan Pienaar tell his men: "Rommel, he'll not pass, damned if he will. These guns will stop him, smash him to hell." General Dan went among his gun crews and talked to them. His men loved him and they were repeating what he said: "damned if that Rommel will pass."

The Axis came from the sky, from the land, came with fighting plane and with dive bomber, came with tanks and with infantry storming El Alamein.

The Springbok guns spoke without ceasing, day and night for three days and three nights. The men almost dropped beside their guns. A barrage came from British guns in the rear and fell short, very close to the South Africans. The men were full of the story that was told that General Dan rang up Cairo and said: "If you damn well don't stop firing on my boys I'll come through to Cairo bringing Rommel with me."

The guns knocked out the tanks, drove them back, drove Rommel back to lick his wounds. The Springboks held the fort. Reinforcements came up and the battle was saved. Cairo heard the news and it was stunned. Life flowed back into the veins of the city. The rich people, a long way off, heard the news and thought again . . . and trickled back. The concrete defences went up. The fortress of El Alamein became a stone wall. There were many lulls in the battles. The Allied armies dug in. Day by day, week by week, the great machine was being built for the battle which was to drive Rommel and his Italian jackals back on the desert tracks.

Moonlight nights with only a few guns speaking, and Hugh and Michael talked a great deal.

"You used to say in Abyssinia," said Hugh, "that you could not die there because you had to kill some Nazis. You have killed Nazis. Are you happy about it?"

Michael's eyes clouded. "I am a soldier now," he said. "There is no hate in me. I am quite impersonal when I kill."

"There is no satisfaction in it?" said Hugh.

"None," said Michael. "It is not the way to solve the problems of mankind. We kill one another, we die in our prime, we lose the real capital of the world . . . youth. It is not the way out."

Hugh sat quietly. He stared at the stars and said: "I wonder what God thinks about us all. But do you believe in God, Michael; sometimes I can't."

"I must believe in a power," said Michael. "I must believe even to-night, when I don't know if I shall die to-morrow . . . I must believe, even were it only for the stars, for the murmur of the living sea."

Hugh handed him a cigarette. They smoked, and Hugh said: "At Sidi Rezegh I saw a fellow badly wounded. Two of our native stretcher-bearers came to him and the man cried: 'Dear Christ, Christ is black.' Why did he say that?"

"He was in great pain, I suppose," said Michael. "He saw a man who had come to ease his pain and he thought the man was Christ."

"It's been worrying me," said Hugh. "You as a philosopher put your finger on it at once. It's a strange thought isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Why not a black, brown or a yellow Christ? We white people think we are the lords of the universe, but as you know I've always said the colour bar is so much nonsense."

"I see," said Hugh.

Hugh snuffed his cigarette in the sand. Then he said: "Michael, beside Cairo this desert is clean. But we go to the city and we stand in the square and life surges around us. We get shaky with excitement. We want to cry out . . . we want to go mad with joy. We are alive. It happened to me first at Mogadishu. I was so much younger then . . . I feel now that I have lived everything. We get all shaky with excitement. And we have a desert thirst. We hate water. We hate memories. We hate perhaps something we have done, some mean thing. We remember the face of a youth lying in the sand. We must forget, must, damn it, we must. Otherwise we would just go mad. And the very sight of a white woman makes one sick with lust. It happened to me, it happens to us all. The very freedom is intoxicating. We wash the blood from our hands, the hate from our hearts, and the dirt from our bodies. And then we go in for the dirt. Oh Michael, am I boring you?"

"No, Hugh, I've always known that you wanted to talk about it. Go on."

"In the desert, fighting for our lives, we are men," Hugh went on. "In the desert in the lulls we think alone. We are dreadfully alone. I'm lonely even with you beside me sometimes. You would put yourself between a bullet meant for me, if you could, and I would for you. And then in the lulls, in the great silences, we think our own thoughts. And they are clean . . . clean like the white sand before the juggernauts of war churned them into powder."

The drone of planes filled the sky, but they did not look up. Searchlights suddenly swept over the desert, and then it was dark again. Voices filled the night. Somebody was playing a banjo, somebody was singing an old Afrikaans trek song.

"There's an Afrikaner singing about the things his fathers knew," said Michael.

"Yes," said Hugh, "something that matters. I took the veld for granted . . . but I know now that it means to me what it means to the Afrikaner . . . home. Where was I? Oh yes, the lulls when one thinks. I think of Elsebe and you think of Magda . . . and they are so real. But when the jungle gives us a little freedom, when the chains are off us, we go to the city. And we get all excited. We want to live, for we are afraid that when we come back to the desert we'll have nothing except a little cross on a mound of sand. And we shan't have lived when that happens. I am twenty, just twenty . . . I lost you in Cairo the last time, I always lose you. I drifted with some fellows to the cabarets, drank a little, and then more, and then a Greek girl came to me. The place is full of girls who have come from hunger to selling their bodies. She was young and dark and her eyes were beautiful . . . I went from cabaret to cabaret and a French girl told me about Paris. And a Slav girl with a body warm like old ivory . . . and behind everything the greasy brothel-keepers. Then back in the great struggle, seeing the courage of my fellows . . . I can't make any sense out of it. I sometimes wonder what I shall tell Elsebe."

"You will tell her everything."

"I will not."

"We shall see," said Michael.

"I hope I never see Cairo again on leave," said Hugh. "Next time I just want to pass through it on my way home, and home for good."

"The war will last quite a long time," said Michael. "If Stalingrad falls it will last a hell of a long time. But Stalingrad will not fall."

"Your faith in the Russians never varies, Michael?"

"Never, Hugh. Those people have something more than we have to fight for, they have a great experiment which has surprised the world. We must borrow the best from that experiment."

"You mean we must graft the best in Democracy and Communism," said Hugh.

"Yes, Hugh. And when you return to the world, preach that gospel. The world can't go on in the same old haphazard way."

"And you, Michael, what shall you do?"

"If I survive . . ."

"What do you mean, survive?"

"If I survive," repeated Michael. "The chances are that neither you nor I will come through. When the big attack comes, and it's as certain as the sun went down to-night, as certain as back there

Cairo has returned to its Sodom and Gomorrah, many of us will go out. We are the pawns in the big game . . . we chose to be in it."

"Damn you, Michael, don't be pessimistic. You sent shivers down my back."

"If I am lucky then," Michael said, "the first thing I shall do is to sit down and stare at Magda a long, long time. Then I suppose I'll have a good cry, the best I've had since I was a child. And we shall sit close together, and it won't matter if I don't eat or sleep for days . . . I'll be very happy."

"My God, how you love her, Michael."

"I love her as God must love the world. We suffered together. This fighting is nothing like the agony we two have known. I'll tell her how I missed her, how I ached for her . . . and then we'll plan something. She tells me that she has saved enough money for me to go to University in Johannesburg to take my degree. I'll take it, I suppose. I want to teach children. There is great scope in South Africa to teach children to hate racialism and all the rottenness it brings."

"That's great, Michael."

Michael said: "We must fight racialism between the British and the Afrikanders and fight for a fair deal for the black and the coloured people."

The spatter of machine guns, the coughing of the Ack-ack guns, the song of the sea, the whine of a bomb falling somewhere by the shore, falling into the sea with a splash.

"After we finish with all that," said Michael.

CHAPTER XXIII

PHILIP and Joan Wayne were waiting to listen to General Smuts on the radio. Like all the people who had sons in the North they expected comfort from his words. In the dark days he had given them light. He had always insisted that in the initial stages of war the Germans had won battles but they had always lost the final victory. They were waiting to hear him talk about Tobruk. They did not then know that Hugh was not with the garrison. Their minds were confused. There was dead silence in many homes of South Africa that evening as Smuts began his speech with his pronounced Afrikaans accent and the quick darting words. He defended the garrison of Tobruk. He called for men to avenge Tobruk. He declared that the Springbok army would some day enter Italy and bring home the Springboks.

When the speech was over Joan Wayne said: "The young men will flock to the colours now, Philip."

"I wonder," replied Philip. "Many rich people have gone away. Some of them have found urgent business to attend to in America and some have gone to South America. I was told to-day that many

rich South Africans have bought American insurance policies. They are not allowed to take much money out of the country, but when they get to America they can cash their policies at a discount. I've heard of men who have taken enough diamonds with them to ransom half-a-dozen Marie Antoinettes. There is no real patriotism."

"Why doesn't the Government do something?" she asked. "Didn't Smuts say early in the war that there would be no rich people."

"Yes he did, but I am also a rich man."

"But you don't run away to America, and you pay your taxes and you don't try to dodge issues. Philip, do you think that Hugh was at Tobruk?"

"I don't think so. He was with the First Division and the Second was in Tobruk. Magda Weiner came to see me to-day. She too, was wondering if her husband might be in Tobruk. She looked ill."

Joan Wayne was silent. Philip added: "Elsebe Joubert also rang me."

"Who is she?"

"Don't you remember the girl Hugh brought to tea that day, the girl from the University?"

"Oh yes, the Afrikaner girl. What did she want?"

"She was also worried that Hugh might be with the Tobruk garrison."

"Why?"

"Because she is interested in Hugh, I suppose."

"Good gracious, I thought that Hugh would have forgotten her long ago. He never mentions her in his letters."

Her husband took his pipe out of his mouth. It was better for Joan to know now. He saw the fear in her eyes, the bewilderment in her face.

He said deliberately: "They write to each other."

"Good God," she said, "why didn't you stop it?"

He filled his pipe slowly.

"Why didn't you stop it?" she repeated.

"How could I?" he said. "They wanted to keep in touch with each other."

She was full of vexation. "And I knew nothing," she said. She was angry. He saw her face flush. Her blue eyes were hard. "I don't want Hugh to marry an Afrikaner girl," she said. "I won't let him. He must marry someone of his own station, someone British at least. I don't believe in mixed blood."

He was pulling hard at his pipe and was almost hidden behind a cloud of smoke. He could not forgo the jibe: "That's what the Nazis prate about—the purity of race. That's what the South African nationalists din into the ears of their followers. That's all nonsense."

"You're actually in favour of the liaison," she said.

"I'm not taking sides," he said. "The young must decide for themselves."

"I'll stop it if it is the last thing I do."

"How?"

"I don't know yet. Why, for all we know some of her family might be in the Simon Nel gang. You can't trust the Afrikaners."

His teeth suddenly clamped on his pipe. "That's not fair," he said. "Were it not for the Afrikaners Smuts wouldn't have much of an army. And what if some of her family were rebels—how does that brand her?"

She looked a little lost as she stared at him. She wanted to whip him with her tongue but she could find no words. She would have to make an ally of Philip when the battle for Hugh's future was being fought. She wanted to test him out now, but she knew it was the wrong time. He would never face issues until they were upon him. She would have to work slowly and cleverly, as a woman works . . . when a man did not know what the woman was playing for. She shrugged her shoulders. "There's time enough to settle that when Hugh comes from the hell of war."

"Yes," he said, and he was glad of the escape.

The days passed into weeks and the lists of prisoners were in the newspapers. Hugh was still a free man. Michael was free. The stand was made at El Alamein and the fear went out of people's hearts. They knew that the big battle was still to be fought, but they were optimistic now. The winter gave way to rich spring and blossom and green returned to the streets and the gardens of the Rand. And the gold was still being dug in the guts of the earth and it was still being shipped and buried in Fort Knox in America.

America was cutting down its gold production. So were Australia and Canada. But the Rand defended its output of gold. It was going higher and higher. More sand fell on the towers of the mine dumps. They were the eternal symbol of the life and the hopes of the Rand.

The people who were still opposed to the war hoped that Rommel would break through. They had not moved from their policy or their hate of the Government which had snatched a victory and sent old General Hertzog into the wilderness. They quarrelled among themselves as the Afrikaners had always done since the days of the Great Trek. They were now split into many factions. After the arrest of Simon Nel and some fifty of his followers there had been a recurrence of bombing. And then it suddenly stopped.

Carl Joubert was back at his work, but the fire had gone from his heart. He had read every word of the evidence given at the preparatory trial against Nel and his confederates. When the trial opened Simon Nel gave the salute as he entered the dock. He had grown a moustache in prison and had trained a lock of his dark hair to fall over his forehead.

Several of his followers were acquitted. Simon and five other

men were sent for trial on charges of high treason. Conviction meant death. But Simon disappeared from the columns of the newspapers. He was in prison awaiting the final trial.

Carl was warned again by Dr. van Niekerk that he might fall a victim to tuberculosis. He had to cut down on his smoking. He smoked milder cigarettes. His mother started him on them; she had inquired for the mildest in tobacconist shops.

His mother also watched that he should not work after he had left his office desk. Elsebe led him on to talk about the things that worried him. At last he agreed with her that the way to raise the thinking and the standards of their own people was by persuasion and not by revolution.

One day he said to her: "Sis, deep down in my heart the thing that worries me is that I let Simon Nel down. I ran away."

"You ran away," she said, "because you had seen a dreadful sight. Even Simon Nel's heart might easily have jumped to the right side of his body if he had seen what you saw."

"They come in my dreams. They were so young. I've tried to pray as Mama wants me to, but my words are empty. The boys come between me and God."

His long pale face etched in pain, his restless hands. And then he coughed. She saw the veins standing out on his thin neck. The coughing passed.

She read him a letter she had just received from Hugh. Then he said: "He hates the war, you can see it underlined in almost everything he says."

"I thought so too," she said. "You will like Hugh, Carl."

"I wonder what has happened to me really," he said. "Here you are in love with an Englishman and I have no resentment about it now. But who is this Michael that Hugh talks so much about? If anything happens to him Hugh will break his heart."

Elsebe told him the story of Michael and Magda.

"She is a brilliant woman you say. How brilliant?"

"An M.A. of Vienna University."

"An M.A. selling hats?"

Elsebe nodded. "You see," she said, "she cannot teach in our schools without a South African degree. She was telling me the other day of a friend of hers who qualified as a doctor in Vienna, a woman, and she is a typist in Durban."

"We would be overrun if we allowed these aliens to take up their professions in the Union."

"I suppose that is the problem," she said. "But I've been thinking, Carl, what a waste it is for a woman like Magda to be selling hats, and for a woman like her friend to be battering a typewriter when in the country there are far too few doctors."

"There are far too many Jewish doctors as it is," he said. "But I'd like to meet your friend Magda."

Elsebe thought that Magda might help Carl out of his melancholy,

but it was Martha who saw an inner light in the eyes of Carl when he first met Magda. She knew that women had played little or no part in his life. He had been too absorbed in himself, in his hates and his dreams to have bothered overmuch about women. She saw how he had almost been struck dumb by the beauty of Magda Weiner. She had no fears that he would make love to the Viennese Jewess. She saw that Magda was too strong and that all her love was concentrated on her husband, who was away fighting in the desert. But her heart jumped . . . she knew that Carl would tell Magda what he would never tell her . . . he would bare his soul, and Martha knew that it was good to bare one's soul.

Carl spoke very little over dinner. And after dinner Magda, who was gently prodded by Martha, talked about life in Vienna and about Michael, about the coming of the Nazis and about the tragedy which was now enveloping the Jewish race.

She was smoking a cigarette which Carl had lit for her with his unsteady, long fingers. "What have my people done?" she asked bitterly, "what sin, what terrible sin, that they should be driven into the slaughter houses? And the children, at least what have the children done?"

He said uneasily: "But isn't so much of it propaganda? All the atrocity stories can't be true."

"Have you read *Mein Kampf*?"

"Yes," he said.

"That should convince you," she said.

He was a little afraid of her, afraid of her beauty and her tongue. And yet he was drawn towards her like a moth to a candle. He drove her home and thanked her for her presence in his house. She came often and he listened. One night, he promised himself, he would unburden himself to her. She would listen to him.

The night came, a moonlight night. He drove out of Johannesburg to the north. The night was fragrant with the spring. They drove past the orchards of Linden where the trees were in full flower, and along a red dirt track where a blue-gum plantation ran down a hill into a little valley. He pulled up the car by the edge of the wood.

Magda had known for some time that Carl was hungry to talk with her alone. She also knew that although he was in love with her he would not have the courage to tell her. She was quite safe. In the quiet world they smoked and looked on the rolling veld, white in the moonlight. Carl always talked to her in English. He spoke it with a decided accent, but his Afrikaans was too scholastic for Magda to understand it entirely.

"Magda," he said, "I have so wanted to talk with you. You will know much about me."

"Yes," she said, "everything. It was at my suggestion that Elsebe went to Mr. Wayne. Yes, I know everything."

"What I was?"

"Yes, your fanaticism, your hate of the English and the Jews, your joining up with Simon Nel."

"And what did you think?" His eyes were so very wide, his face so pale.

"I had a great contempt for you. I thought you weak, weak as water. You did not interest me. I was sorry for Elsebe and for your mother . . . you were breaking their hearts, and I hated you for your conceit, for your foolishness. I had seen young men like you, men brutalised by a machine that churned out thoughts. I hated them like the devil. They were scum." She saw the threads of agony running over his face. "You were indecent. I knew you before I had seen you . . . but the mistake I made was this. I thought that you would not change until you were hurt physically. You were hurt mentally when you saw the scattered bits of those boys' bodies on the railway line. Now you are a ghost, haunted, restless."

The whip was in her tongue, and she lashed. "You wanted to fight for freedom but not in the open. You bombed the innocents . . . but you never lit a fuse yourself. You were one of the leaders of the revolution, and you were ready to climb to power over the bruised bodies of your victims. You were arrogant, prating about freedom, which you wanted to deny everybody who wasn't of your way of thinking. You were a Nazi in a free country . . . you were tolerated instead of being shot. You worked in the dark and your ways were the ways of darkness. I have always wanted to say these things."

"I know," he said, "but you haven't said everything."

"What are words?" she said. She took her eyes off him and looked across the country. "Well, I'll say it. Now you are a coward. You can't sleep. You start when you hear a strange footstep. Physically you have always been a coward, but it's your mind that is worrying you now. There are times when you want to give yourself up to stand your trial by the side of that bombastic Simon Nel. You would like to be martyred, but you are afraid of the physical pain."

She stopped suddenly. Tears sprang into her eyes. "I'm sorry," she said.

Her tears brought him a sudden calm. While she had been speaking he had felt like a fly in a spider's web. He had struggled to get free. He said quietly: "I wouldn't admit all those things to myself, but you used the very words I was afraid to use. I understand."

"We won't talk of it any more," she said. "Give me a cigarette."

In the light of the match he saw her face. The warm colour had come back into her cheeks.

"Tell me about Michael," he said.

She told him and he saw what the man meant to her. He was all her life. All her hopes were centred on him. She talked of his courage and of his vision. "He wants all men to be free," she said.

"All men, no matter their race or their colour. That is why he must live. He can offer so much to the world."

He had to drift back to the wherefores of the revolutionary urge which had sent him into the ranks of the rebels. There was so much poverty in the land, he said, and almost exclusively in the European section among his own people."

"But it's the system," she replied. "That is what allows exploitation. That is why Michael without a country is now fighting for the world of free men."

A fit of coughing bent him double. When it was over, she said: "That's serious."

"Very serious," he said. "But why shouldn't I suffer?"

Long-faced and lean with his restless hands and the fires dimming in his eyes, with his weak chest, with his world tumbled around his ears, she saw him now as a tragic figure. He had been so much in a hurry as if he had known that he would not live long. He had the emotionalism of his race. He wanted to leave his footprints on the sands of Afrikaner time.

"Perhaps I wanted to be a martyr," he said.

He hated the black people because they had withstood the march of the Voortrekkers . . . and to him the Voortrekkers were the prophets of the Boer testament. They had written it with achievement as they conquered the loneliness and the mountains. They wanted to live close to the soil and near to their God, they wanted to live in small communities under their own skies. He could write a great story of the Trek.

"But I shall never do it now," he said.

"Why not, Carl?"

"I'm doomed," he said. "Doomed like the veld in drought. I know. I have lost my way." He was hunched a little. "You have told me the truth and I'm glad."

"I didn't mean to be so bitter," she said.

"But often isn't truth bitter?" He wanted to lie down on the white veld, she beside him, to feel her fingers in his hair, to close his eyes and listen to her talking softly like running water, like the whisper of the leaves on the gums running down into the valley. He wanted to be seeped in the fragrance of the rose that she was and her black hair tumbling over his face. He wanted something he could never reach, something farther away than the moon. Hers were the hands, the only hands which could drag him away from the leer of Simon Nel, from the sight of the bits of flesh in the moonlight on the glistening railway lines. She was the living moonlight. He would ask her to drive the car home, ask her to drive slowly, but he would not tell her "as slowly as a funeral."

CHAPTER XXIV

EL ALAMEIN was an impregnable fortress. Through the nights men and machines had come up to the battle lines. Tens of thousands of men. Thousands of tanks and big guns. And the lorries came in their many thousands. The armies were gathering for the massive assault. Every man in the army knew that the staff officers had planned the big attack to the last detail. There was a concrete model of the battlefield showing all the lanes of the coming attack.

The men were taut with eagerness, waiting, waiting. They were angry with boredom. In the nights in spite of the shelling they would slip down to the sea and cool their hot bodies.

They heard about the hour of the attack. The whisper slipped from the ridges into the valleys quickly like thoughts. The waiting was over. Now they knew the very hour, that zero hour which they would embrace. An end to inactivity, an end to dodging into their slit trenches. They saw the big bombers sweeping away in the dawn to soften the enemy. All day the sky was full of bombers. And all through the night.

The men were asked if they would attend religious services the night before the night of the attack. And the talk which passed then between Hugh and Michael was symbolic of what happened to most of the men. "I am going," said Hugh. "I'm in no way a religious chap, but I feel the need of something bigger than myself."

"I'll go with you," said Michael. "If we lose this battle then the war will be endless. I have often thought that we should offer our lives to God, consecrate them. Perhaps I'm a little afraid."

The army took communion on the white sands in the sunset, and the sands were tablecloths of gold. Hard men softened in the glow of the sunset. Hearts held the words of the chaplains. The chaplains talked of life amid death. The army prayed on the golden sands. It rose from its knees and a crusading spirit entered the hearts of men.

"I feel clean again," said Hugh, staring across at the Miteriya Ridge.

"There is a great peace in my heart," said Michael.

They went to sleep to the final sounds of the preparation for the battle. They waited throughout the day. They ate well. They watched the sunset making a golden pathway across the sea, the pathway of the dreams of so many men that evening. The men moved to take up their positions. The roads bristled with guns and tanks. They crept out beyond their own minefields. The hour dragged, and then the half-hour. They counted the minutes. Their nerves were ready to snap. Minute by minute and the men waited for the passing of the great peace which was enveloping the world.

Two minutes to go.

"Christ," said a man near Hugh. "Christ, will it ever come?"

His words were hardly out of his mouth when the guns spoke, guns in thousands, guns shattering the windows of Alexandria more than twenty miles away. Nerves eased, there was one long full-throated cry from countless throats and the men moved into the battle. Shells came screaming, mortars came flying, machine gun bullets smashed into the rocks and tore holes in the sand . . . the enemy poured everything into the battle. Men fell and moaned. Men fell and died. Men cursed and bore on . . . on under the big stars, and the guns were louder than the voice of hell.

The desert was on fire. Fire from the mouths of guns, from the tanks. Bombers in the sky. Whistling of bombs. Men could not hear their voices, men fought on through the night.

In the blood-red dawn they blinked and could not believe their eyes. The desert was punctuated with the wrecks of machines. Fires burned like the fires of hell. The big guns went on crashing, smashing. The tide of victory was rolling on. All day, all night, and yet the men went on. They had nothing to eat and they had no sleep . . . but victory lent them wings.

Hugh did not remember how long he had been fighting. He had been carried hither and thither in the transports. He was again on foot. There was a bottle-neck ahead where the retreating axis convoys were jammed. Suddenly many of the men stopped dead in their tracks. Squadrons of bombers were diving on the jammed bottle-neck. The pilots dropped their bombs and then they dived right on to the convoys, blowing them and themselves up. Bomber after bomber did it.

"Christ," said an Australian, "they are Greeks. The Greek pilots have gone mad."

His eyes were almost jumping out of his sockets as Hugh stared on the terrible vengeance of the Greeks. Somebody tapped him on the shoulder. He turned to see Michael, powdered from head to foot in dust, bedraggled, unshaven, tired to death.

"Michael," he said. "You look, you look . . ."

"Just as you look," said Michael.

They turned to stare at the bottle-neck where another bomber blew up with the convoy.

"Christ," said Hugh, "look at that, Michael, the Greeks are mad and they are committing suicide. They're mad as hell. They've gone crazy."

"I've seen it," said Michael. "Hugh, this isn't war, it's murder."

How pale Michael looked under the powdered sand. He was shaking. His rifle dropped from his hand as if his hand had lost the power to hold it.

"Look out," somebody cried.

A Stuka was diving, diving. The machine gunner was firing. Hugh fell flat on his face. The Stuka swept up from a dive, and he raised his head. Michael had been hit. He crawled to him. "Michael, Michael." He shook him. Michael was dead, dead.

"Christ, Michael is dead. He was tired of it all." Hugh stood up and stared at the crumpled body. "You didn't lie down, Michael." A trickle of blood flowed down Michael's face washing the sand away. Hugh knelt down and wiped off the blood. "Why didn't you lie down, Michael?" he cried.

He did not know where he was except that he was in the darkness. He could not move his hands. He wanted to fling them over his eyes. The Greeks were mad. Look at the poor bastards, they're blowing themselves up with the bloody convoys. They're sending the Jerries to hell and they want to go with them and they want to give them more hell when they get there. "Look, Michael, look at the Greeks gone mad."

Why, why could he not move his hands? "Michael, I want to wash the blood from your face, Michael." The great impenetrable darkness. "Go away, Elsebe. I'm mad can't you see? Mad like the Greeks. Christ, this is murder, murder."

And Dirk would come, Dirk with his poor blind eyes. "Dirk, Dirk, the Greeks are committing suicide, the poor bastards." Faces, faces. "Your skin is like ivory, Natasha, like warm ivory. You are too beautiful for a prostitute."

Darkness, the great darkness. Noise of the guns, noise of hell. Wandering, wandering. Mine-dumps, men in the darkness digging for gold. "No Magda, I couldn't feel it. He didn't fall down when the Stuka came. He was watching the poor mad Greek airmen. He looked sick . . . he was sick. He broke his heart in the desert before he was killed by a bullet."

Now he could hear the voice of the world and he tried to catch and hold it but it slipped away again. Sleep, sleep and forgetfulness. He awakened after a long, long time, and he was fumbling, climbing out of a pit of darkness. He opened his eyes. Gradually his surroundings sank into his consciousness. He looked round. He was in a hospital ward. He gasped for breath. He could see the face of a woman now, a V.A.D., pretty with fair hair, and she was smiling.

"Where am I?" he asked.

She leaned over him. "In Cairo," she said.

He found that his hands were tied to his sides. "My hands are tied?" he said.

"Yes," she said softly, "you were tearing at your face."

"Oh, I see, I'm wounded."

"No," she said. "You've been in a nightmare for a long time."

"I'm thirsty, sister."

He drank from a glass she held to his mouth. He sighed.

"What happened to me?"

"I don't know."

"I'm all right, now. Loose my hands. I'm famished."

She squeezed an orange for him and gave him the juice to drink.

"I'm as right as rain, sister. Take my bonds away."

She loosened his hands. She went away and he looked at the man in the opposite bed. The man had a bandage around his head.

"Hello, mate," said the wounded soldier. "I hopes yer stops torkin' in yer bloody sleep 'bout the poor Greek bastards as you call 'em, the suicide boys, I serpose."

"What's happened to them?"

"They 'ad to pull 'em outer the scrap for the time bein'. They was wreckin' too many expensive bombers, And you was torkin' 'bout a mate, a bloke called Michael."

"Yes, yes."

The doctor came. He told Hugh all about himself. Hugh remembered. "I'm all right now, doctor," he said.

"I hope so lad," said the doctor. "You'll have to go slow, very slow."

Often for no cause at all he would find himself shivering, and he could not stop it. Often in the night he would awaken suddenly and find himself crying out loud. He would take a dive from the bed believing that he was in the desert and that a Stuka was diving on him.

Methodically, as if he had gone back over all the lanes of his memory in his sleep, he would recall all the hideous sights he had seen, a man suddenly staggering with his head blown clean off, and then the body taking a few steps and grotesquely falling into the sand. Often he saw Dirk laughing one minute and then blinded on Amba Alagi. Always the face of Michael haunted his sleep. Often, too, he would awake crying out loud: "Christ is black."

They gave him drugs. One day he read in the newspaper that General Dan Pienaar had been killed in an air-crash. His eyes suddenly blinded with tears. Far away in the Free State at the same moment Dirk was listening to a wireless and he heard the news. He was struck dumb and then he wept. In the desert Springboks mourned for Dan Pienaar.

Hugh was sent home. His father, mother, Elsebe and Magda weré at the station. He hardly knew them. He was like a man walking in a dream. Johannesburg startled him, frightened him. He was sent to a convalescent hospital near his own home. His mother came every day laden with things she thought would please him. Now and again he caught the sorrow in her face. He saw her cry but that did not affect him much.

He would say: "Time will heal me, the doctors say. Time, Mother."

He knew her very well now. He knew his father, kind, knowledgeable, who did not pester him with questions. Elsebe with her little Madonna-like face, the tears glistening in her big eyes, drawing him back from the world of fantasy, drawing him gently with her little, warm hands. Magda with the pain in her eyes . . . beautiful in her tragedy.

Shivering, shivering . . . but the fits came less often. He was

with men all suffering from the same disease, slaves to their memories. They all knew what he said in his sleep, just as he knew what they said. The furtive glances, the fears, the sorrows which had bitten deep into their sensitive souls. They were all creeping out of the darkness, crawling from the welter of blood and the screams of the dying. Their nerves had snapped, their souls had gone into purgatory, and they were men of all types, big men and small men, mentally and physically. Men who could not harness their thoughts. They got used to one another, they began to listen to each other patiently, helping each other over the stiles out of the darkness.

And Michael said to his fellows one morning: "Did any of you hear me shouting in my sleep last night?"

And one of them said: "I slept very little. You talked little. You were talking quite quietly to Michael."

That day Magda and Elsebe came. He said: "I'm getting better. I sleep easier. Magda, I want to tell you about Michael."

"I want to know," she said, and her big eyes fell to her hands.

"I feel I can talk now. I'm getting cured. This all happened to me, you know, because Michael was killed. I loved him like a brother."

He told her of their talks in the desert before the big attack. "He seemed to have a presentiment," he said. "He found me in the battle. I was watching the Greek airmen attacking the German convoys and after they had exhausted their ammunition they hurled their bombers into the convoys and died in them. He was watching. And I think his heart broke at that moment. A dive bomber came and I fell down. He stood, he wouldn't fall on the sand. They got him."

He shivered a little in the warm day. And Elsebe said quietly: "And then something snapped in you."

"That's it," he said. "I remember I wiped the blood from his face . . . and then everything went black." He looked at Magda. "I'm sorry."

"He broke his heart," she whispered. "He had suffered enough to break his heart before he went to the war."

Still Michael haunted his sleep, but the terror was passing from his mind. One day Nicodemus suddenly appeared in the hospital gardens.

"Basie," he said, "my Basie."

"Nic," said Hugh.

"They wouldn't let me come in, Basie," he said. "Nic tried many times."

"Why didn't I think of it? You could have come with my father."

"Yes, Basie. You're better now. Master told me you didn't know people. You're getting better now."

The twisted smile. The sudden tears in the brown, dog-like eyes.

"I'm coming home soon, Nic."

"Oh, Basic, to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, perhaps."

He went home for a week. He found that he had to put a halter on his tongue. He had to cut the oaths in half sometimes. He could not wholly rid himself of the jargon of the desert.

Shivering fits came and then he would crawl to his room until the shivers passed. Elsebe came and sat with him in the garden, and his mother made her welcome because his father insisted, saying to her: "Please don't worry him now. You know that the doctors say that he mustn't be upset."

"I wouldn't upset him for the world," she said. "He's home and he's been through more than if he had lost a limb or an eye."

Nicodemus sang as he mowed the lawns. Basic was home.

Hugh went with Elsebe into the city and still the city frightened him. The rush of the people, the merry-go-round of life, the city that was a million miles from the war, sickened him. Life was the same as when he left. People who could afford it ate a lot and drank a lot. There were glamour parades and tea parties for war funds.

He tried to drive his mother's car one day, but he was scared of the traffic. It was best to sit on the long stoep staring at the garden and the sky, watching Nicodemus. On Wednesday afternoon, when the hat shop was closed, Magda came to sit with him. There was no one else at home. His mother had gone to a glamour parade. They sat in the summer house at the bottom of the garden.

"You're looking better," she said. "You're beginning to live again."

"Yes," he said, "the dreadful dreams are getting fewer. It seems as if I had been for a long time on another planet and that suddenly I fell to earth, to an earth that was strange to me. But the past is slipping away."

"I suppose," she said, "that when you are yourself, you'll go and see Dirk."

"Yes," he said. "I shall see Dirk soon."

"He's a rare man," she said. "He has changed. All the laughing, blustering ways have gone. He is sober and quiet. He came all the way from the Free State to see me when Michael died."

"Blind Dirk came all the way?"

"He brought the picannin, Teboa, with him."

"We'll go to see him," he said. "Elsebe and you and I some day. Poor lonely Dirk Cilliers."

She wanted him to repeat all that Michael had said to him in the desert.

"I've been thinking, trying to think out what Michael would want me to do," she said. "I saved money so that he could go to the University and get a South African degree. I decided last night. I shall go to the University, get my degree, and teach. He was going to teach had he lived."

"That is what Michael would have wished," he said. "I am sure now."

When he returned to the hospital they kept him only for another week. He was finally discharged. He drove the car . . . he was not afraid. He took Elsebe out to the hills. They lay under the stars, close, and they heard the beating of the heart of the earth. A great passion surged through him.

"Please," she said, "don't hurt me."

"Sorry," he said. "I am rough, my hands are rough, my very mouth is hard, and my heart perhaps. I want to take off your shoes, I want to strip you. I've been dead so long, so very long."

She held his hands. "Hugh," she said startled. "Hugh, what has happened to you?"

He loosed her and sat up. "I've been killing men," he said. "I went mad in the battle. I went to Cairo and . . . and . . . I went mad there too—I knew this would have to happen."

He told her everything just as Michael said he would. She was silent when he had finished speaking.

"Say something," he said.

"Nothing matters," she said. "Nothing in the wide world except that you are with me, that you can hold me and strip me if you like, Hugh. You have been through hell and I know nothing about it. I know that I love you."

He sat with his chin cupped in his hands, staring into the starlight of the veld.

"I didn't think it would be so easy," he said. "Something happens inside you in war, Elsebe." He took her hands and pressed them. "You live like an animal in the desert . . . you sometimes eat and sometimes you don't. You get dirty inside and out. I can't explain it better than that. You are in revolt against every tenet of decency. You want to defy fate and the death that is waiting for you around the corner. You forget everything you've learnt. When you get from the battle line you go mad with excitement. You want to do mad things. You do horrible things, too. I wondered sometimes why God didn't strike me dead. I can see myself now in Cairo, arrogant with the drink in me. I can see myself in the desert battles full of hate and strength and full of fear sometimes. I went to the gates of hell . . . and I am glad I escaped. But there's still a long way to go."

CHAPTER XXV

THE trial had been completed almost a year after Simon Nel was captured. There was such a mass of evidence that the three judges who sat on the case decided to take many weeks to prepare the judgment. Carl was told by Julius one morning that the judgment was being given that day. His mother had said: "You look so unwell, Carl, please don't go to the office to-day."

He had not taken her advice. He had to go to the Palace of Justice in Pretoria to see the curtain fall on the drama of Simon Nel. But before he went he had to see Magda. He told her on the telephone: "Magda, can you please slip out of the shop to the Greek tearoom near the corner of Joubert and Jeppe streets for about a quarter-of-an-hour." His voice became urgent. "Judgment is being given in Pretoria to-day in the Simon Nel case."

In the café there was a great weariness in his sagging body as he leaned over the little table.

"Don't go, Carl," she said.

"I must," he said, "I can't keep away."

"It will be dangerous," she said. "That man still dominates you to your very soul."

"He pulls me, Magda."

She pleaded: "Just for to-day. If you can keep away to-day you will be free."

"I promised to follow him to heaven or to hell," he said. "I fell under the mesmerism of his voice and the flame in his eyes. That flame burnt into me. We built together the new South Africa, the Union of the Afrikaners . . . and now it has come to this." He paused and sipped his coffee. He looked directly into her eyes. "What is going to happen I don't know, but I want to tell you this . . . thank you for helping me, for talking to me. You know what you have meant to me."

"I know," she said.

He saw her linger once as she walked up the street, but she did not look back.

Travelling at no more than twenty miles an hour he took in the sweep of the veld from the roadside, and there was a haze over the distant mountains. He saw the dappled shadows under the avenues, and passed a slowly plodding ox-wagon. Perhaps he had tried to move too fast, perhaps he should have gone at the pace of the ox-wagon which had been fast enough for the Voortrekkers. He had always loved the Pretoria Road, its breadth, and the way it looped and ran up hill and down dale. He loved its vistas on either side, the glimpse of a farm nestling among trees far away from the main road . . . the dirt tracks running like veins from the parent road. Here and there a native hut and sometimes a cluster clinging to the koppies.

He drove immediately to the Palace of Justice. Armed policemen stood in the roadway and at the doors. The corridors were also full of armed policemen. He slipped to the press table where he was greeted by the Afrikaner journalists who knew him. He was afraid to look at the dock. He could feel eyes boring into him. One of the three judges was reading the judgment. He was dealing with the case of Simon Nel. The judge was coming to the end so far as Nel was concerned. He was summing up. The Court, he said, found that Simon Nel had landed from a German submarine on the

coast of Namaqualand, that he had come to create disorder, even to the leading of a rebellion. Simon Nel, the cold deliberate voice continued, had been recognised as the stranger who had come out of the rain and the mist of the desert by Henrik, the coloured herd, and his master Sarel Potgieter. A German prisoner of war in the Union had given evidence that Nel had been a parachutist in the German army. Nel had come into the country with plenty of money. There was sufficient circumstantial evidence to suggest that he was behind a great deal of the bombing. Simon Nel had attempted to send messages by wireless to Germany. Two of his men, mere youths, had been killed when they tried to blow up a railway line.

Carl shuddered. Then for the first time he looked at the dock. Nel was staring at him. Fire leapt from the dark eyes. The thick lips moved and Carl read the word "traitor."

He turned his head away and stared again at the judge whose words fell like stones, and Simon Nel was asked to stand. Carl looked at him. Simon was staring at the judge. "Simon Nel, the Court finds you guilty of High Treason," said the judge.

Simon Nel smiled, gave the salute, sat down, thrust out his jaw. Carl watched him fascinated and glanced at the five other men in the dock. He knew them all, he was not very interested in them. They fidgeted. And Simon Nel grinned.

Back in Court after lunch Carl knew that now he would have to face Simon. He stared at him and a slow ironic smile passed over Simon's face. Then he grinned. Then he got tired of looking at Carl. The judge went on reading, dealing with the second man in the dock, a young man, one of the ordinary men in the street. Next to him was a weed of a man. The three others were tending towards middle age, heavy men, with scared eyes.

Armed policemen in the doorways and six armed men in a row behind the dock. A few paces from Nel were two plain-clothes detectives, one a famous ex-Springbok Rugby player, who looked bored as he stood there with folded arms. The Court was so well guarded both inside and out that a mouse had no chance of escape.

Simon was cracking jokes with the detectives, but he was doing all the smiling. The detectives tried hard to look wooden. Simon wrote notes to his counsel, waited for the nod and then smiled. Sometimes he stared at the ceiling. He was not listening at all. Sometimes he looked around at the spectators and looked grim. Often he looked sternly at Carl.

The second accused was found guilty. He stood shakily. Nel stood up and shook hands with his brother in rebellion and saluted.

The monotony went on and on. The people fidgeted. The policemen yawned. Simon Nel seemed to be the only really unconcerned man in the Court.

Carl was looking at Simon and Simon was whispering to one of the detectives, and then he flicked a finger across his throat giving

the perfect gesture of a man with the noose round his neck, and the head was jerked back. Simon gave a wide grin. And Carl trembled.

The second man was found guilty. Again Simon Nel leaned across, shook the man by the hand and stared around the Court giving the salute.

Drone of voices. Drama and melodrama. The story of the submarine coming and going. The hours crawled. One after the other the three remaining men were acquitted, and one of them with a head as bald as an egg wanted to make a speech, but the judge stopped him. Simon Nel shook hands with them as they walked out of the dock.

The drama was coming to a close. The policemen came alive. The spectators who had sat all day on the hard benches suddenly shook themselves out of their boredom. Carl was watching Simon. He was tense like a retriever. He was smiling, but the smile was hard. A great silence fell on the Court as the judge asked Nel in Afrikaans if he had anything to say before sentence of death was passed on him. The judge had given the judgment almost entirely in English.

Simon Nel rose. He thrust out his jaw and looked around. Then he faced the bench. He had a piece of notepaper in his hand. He glanced at it. His voice was like the staccato burst of bullets. "To hell with mercy," he said. The words tumbled out of him, an attack on Communists and Jews.

"Nel," said the judge, "the Court is not prepared to listen to a political speech."

Nel shook himself as if he were shot. "I apologise," he said. He glanced at his notes. "I am a disciple of Adolf Hitler and an Afrikaner in blood and bone. I begged the German authorities to send me home so that I could lead a rebellion against the tyrants who enslave my country."

Again the cold voice interrupted him. "Nel, if you persist in this tone the Court will have to pass sentence in your absence."

"I apologise," said Simon Nel, and he bowed to the judges. He fumbled for words. He had lost the thread of his great funeral oration which he had so carefully prepared, the oration which he meant to be remembered by in Afrikaner hearts and minds for all time. When he was dead his people would build a monument to him and some of that oration would be carved on it. He was lost just as he had been lost in the dreadful desert in the mist and the rain. But he could not forgo that oration. "The sword of Adolf Hitler," he screamed, and again the voice stopped him. He added quickly that he knew the people who were condemning him to death and that the youth of Afrikanerdom would make them pay a bloody price.

"Is that all?" asked the judge.

"All," said Simon Nel.

Deliberately, as if he were looking into a mirror, he straightened his tie and stared at the judge. All eyes were on him. The tight

jaw never flinched as the sentence of death was passed, to be hanged by the neck . . . The second man got five years' penal servitude and the third three years.

It was all over. Carl felt a lump in his throat. Simon was coming from the dock with his right hand at the salute. At the top of the steps leading down to the cells below a few sobbing women in shabby black kissed him. Carl was standing just behind the women. He wanted to call Simon by name but his voice had gone. Simon Nel saw him. His face went livid, his eyes blazed, his fists clenched. "Judas," he hissed, and then he stepped out of sight.

The cry was ringing in Carl's ears. He drove out of Pretoria but not on the road to Johannesburg. He drove to the railway line where the boys had been killed. A few hundred yards from where they had met their death there was an open railway crossing. He pulled up near the crossing. He waited. He knew now why his mother had feared the day. He knew now that Simon Nel would never let him go. His muddled brain remembered that Simon's counsel had immediately given notice of appeal and he knew that many months would pass before the appeal could be heard. But he was tired to death. He pulled out a packet of cigarettes and then suddenly threw them away. He waited. Memories crowded in on him, memories of Simon Nel and the great crusade which was to have saved Afrikanderdom. But now he did not hate anybody, except himself. Was Simon acting all the time in Court, or was he really afraid? Had he rehearsed every gesture, every smile, in gaol? It didn't matter now, nothing mattered. The night was around him. Big clouds roved in the sky threatening rain.

And as he waited Philip Wayne returned home and told Joan that Simon Nel had been sentenced to death.

"I suppose," she said, "that he'll never hang. The Government will probably give him a farm."

"You said that once before, my dear," he said.

"Everybody is saying it," she said. "Anyhow, when are they going to hang him?"

"There'll be an appeal," he said, "that will take months."

She laughed.

And Carl Joubert waited. He remembered Philip Wayne saying, "You're going to your doom." His lips were stone dry. He wanted a cigarette and made to get out, but he checked himself. He saw again the pictures of the Great Trek, the bearded men and their women, dressed in skins, going into the loneliness in their covered wagons. He heard their songs and their prayers. He saw them in laager beating back the black men, women loading the guns for their men. He saw the birth of a nation to which he was heir. He would like to write a poem to Magda but there was no time now. He was glad that most of his prejudices were dead before he was dead.

Then his mother's face came to him, the dear lined face. She

was always right. His dreams were scattered around his feet. His hands trembled. She was calling him home, but he could not go. Judas, Judas . . . the word was ringing in his ears, smiting his mind. You have been a failure Carl Joubert, and there is no room in great crusades for failures or traitors.

Magda was going home on the tram. She usually walked back to the flat but she was very tired. A young couple sat in the seat in front of her. They were talking about Simon Nel. The youth said: "Simon Nel's going to be hanged. Hanging is too good for him."

Magda felt sick. All day she had had a dread that something would happen to Carl. When she got off the tram she went to a call box and rang up the Jouberts. Elsebe answered. "No," she said, "Carl hasn't come home yet. Mother looks terribly worried."

"Do you think I should come over, Elsebe?"

"No," she said. "Carl will come home."

Carl heard the train coming. He started the car. He slipped her into gear. He bit his lips and the blood slavered down his jaws. The wheels were whispering far off: "Judas, Judas." And now louder and louder and louder: "Judas, Judas." Like hammer blows on his brain. The train was coming round the loop. Death was riding round the loop where the boys had died in the moonlight. "Petrus, Petrus, where are you? God, Bartel!" Scattered flesh all over the place, a dead, bloody foot in a shoe. "Christ . . . they are dead, dead, and Carl Joubert is a murderer. They were so young and beautiful. Boys, little boys. I wanted to tell Simon . . . I . . ."

The big eye of light in front of the engine. Now, now. He drove on to the rails, straddled the car across the rails. He switched off the engine. He slumped over the wheel. His hair stood on end. He heard the screech of brakes . . . he heard . . . and then he went spinning, spinning.

Martha Joubert sat at the table. The dinner was cold on the table. Piet and Elsebe watched her. Suddenly she cried: "Carl is dead." They waited, their hearts pounding. "Oh God," she said, "didn't I pray enough?"

She leaned on the table, her face white. Piet was by her side. "Martha," he said. "Martha, what have you seen?"

"Our boy is dead, Piet," she moaned. "I knew it was coming. Our poor, poor Carl."

CHAPTER XXVI

ELSEBE told Hugh the whole story before the inquest was held on Carl. He said little at the time, but later when the story filled the newspapers he told her: "He thought his cause was right. He died for a mirage. I sometimes wonder whether Michael died for another mirage."

"You must not think that," she said.

Then he said bitterly : "Our gold town still worships gold while men starve and die and kill for a system which we believed was doomed when we went into this war. The old things will remain now because Stalingrad and El Alamein saved the world."

He went one day to Sophiatown in search of Nicodemus who had been away for many days. It was his first visit to the native township. Many of the streets were quagmires, for it had rained on the previous night. The place smelt of flesh and evil. Gaunt, hungry dogs went down the streets in packs.

He said to a native : "Who owns those dogs?"

"Some belong to people and some don't," said the man in perfect English. "They hunt in packs and sometimes they eat donkeys alive. Sometimes they eat one another."

"Who are you?" asked Hugh.

"My name is Joseph," said the man. "I am a teacher."

Hugh told him his mission and Joseph said he would accompany him on his inquiries. They went into backyards, crowded yards. Women were cooking on open braziers.

"Are there no fires in the houses Joseph?"

"No sir. All the cooking is done outside. In winter the picannins huddle around the braziers and many of them get burnt."

"How many people live in a room, Joseph?"

"Sometimes a family, father and mother and children, six in a family sometimes. Come on, I'll show you. See, there is one bed. Nothing else. They sleep on the floor and in that bed."

"And what do they pay, Joseph?"

"About one pound ten shillings a month rent."

Joseph chanced on some people who knew Nicodemus. And somebody said that he had been stabbed in a drunken brawl and that he had been taken to hospital.

"Thank you, Joseph," said Hugh, "I'll go to the non-European hospital."

"Why are you so concerned about him, sir?"

"He is our servant ; he has been with us for twenty years. I am fond of him."

Joseph looked solemn. "You, sir, are probably the first white man who has ever come to Sophiatown looking for a black man because you are fond of him. White people shun this terrible place, where we black men live like dogs."

Hugh found Nicodemus lying on the floor in a ward in the non-European hospital. The ward was overcrowded to suffocation. Every bed was occupied. Every place between the beds was crammed with sick people. He called Nicodemus by name and knelt on the floor. Nicodemus opened his tired eyes. "Basie," he said, and closed them again.

A nurse came. "Why didn't you let us know he was here?" asked Hugh. "He has worked for us for twenty years."

"We don't know you from Adam," she said. "He was unconscious when he was brought in with a stab wound in the back."

He looked at her. She was very young and she looked very tired.

"I'm not blaming you," he said. "But what a place, it's like a kraal."

"It is a kraal," she said. "We have to pick our way between the cases. We have to kneel down to give injections. Sometimes we have to put two people in one bed."

"It's a scandal."

"Worse than that," she said.

"Is this what I have been fighting for?"

"Don't ask me," she said. "I wouldn't be doing this work if I didn't pity these poor wretches."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Will Nicodemus recover?"

"Yes," she said, "but he won't be able to work for a long time."

She went away. Hugh knelt beside Nic and took his hand.

"You'll get better," he said.

Nic nodded. "Yes, Basie. Nic will go home to the mountains to rest."

"Yes, Nic. I'll tell father. We were worried. I went to Sophiatown to look for you."

"A bad place, Basie, very bad."

The nurse came back. "Can I have a private ward for him?" asked Hugh.

She laughed. "Not if you paid with all the gold of the Rand," she said. "There are none."

"Can I send him things, food and things?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye Nic," he said. He saw scores of pairs of brown eyes watching him and black faces smiled. They were astonished to see him shake the hand of Nicodemus. He saw the proud look in the face of the old, trusted retainer. White men did not shake hands with black men. He knew that, but it belonged to the past. Had he not seen the courage of black men flaming in the battles for freedom, for decency, for the new world? A cold anger shook him as he went home. A kraal in the heart of the city of gold.

His father and mother came home together and he told them of his search for Nicodemus and how he found him.

"We'll send him home to Basutoland when he is discharged," his father said. "I'll give him a pension."

"I'll tell him that to-morrow," said Hugh. "That will do more for him than all the medicine."

He described the ward.

"I know," said his father.

"Have you been there?" asked Hugh.

"No, but I've heard about it. The scandal of it is always cropping up in the newspapers."

"But why don't we do something, Dad?"

"We'll have to do something," his father said over dinner. "That kraal must go. Public opinion is getting more vocal about the rights of the natives. They've never had a square deal."

"I am going to work for that square deal," said Hugh.

"We'd like you to go to Oxford or Cambridge after the war," said his mother.

"I belong here," he said. "There's plenty to do in our own country."

"For the new world," said his father. "In the Club to-day I saw a lot of miserable faces. It wasn't the war. The tide is running for us now. All the old codgers were woeful because there was no more whisky. They looked as if the end of their world had come."

"That isn't even funny," said Hugh. "Dirk Cilliers didn't lose his eyes and Michael didn't die for men like that. Those are the men who will rob us of the decent world if we let them." He laughed scornfully. "Perhaps it will be the same again . . . the men who bled will be put on the scrap heap and old stubborn men will prop up the old stilts of the old world. I'm telling you the Springboks when they come home after the war will have something to say about all that."

His mother chided, "You're talking Communism, Hugh," she said. "But these days everybody is a Communist until they reach the age of twenty-five."

Her son looked at her. "There are quite a few above the age of twenty-five in Russia who are Communists," he said. "I hope that Russia makes a big slab of the peace."

"We don't want a political argument," said his father. "We were talking about the future of Hugh Wayne."

Hugh was conscious of his mother's uneasiness. She was restless. She looked as if she was going to drop a bomb. He would also drop a bomb.

He said: "Whatever I do will be done for my fellows. I've been afraid in battle, terribly afraid. I've known terror mixed with despair. I've looked into the eyes of death and it was ugly in war. I shall have to go back to the University."

Dinner was finished. He lit his pipe. Then he added: "But first of all I want to do something else. I don't care if it's odd. Everything has been odd for a long time." He hid himself behind a cloud of smoke as he spoke. He saw that his father had done likewise. His mother was waiting for the words she was afraid to hear. "I'm going to marry Elsebe Joubert."

The smoke lifted and fled. His father stared at the ceiling. His mother's face was red. Her lips tightened. He waited for the barrage.

She began quietly: "That is foolish," she said. "Get your degree first."

"You told me that before I went to the war."

She lost her temper then. "For all the good the war has done you it would have been better had you never gone."

He did not reply. She was ready to drop her bomb. "It isn't only that you are in a different class from the Jouberts, but you are English and she is Afrikaans . . ."

He interrupted: "We are both South Africans. This racial stuff and nonsense must go. Afrikanders fought alongside me in Abyssinia, in the broiling heat and in the rain and in the hell of the desert. Dirk lost his eyes for the things we believe in, Michael the Jew died for the very same things."

She broke in: "We know that. You're always talking about it. But there is something else." Now she would drop the bomb. "The girl is a sister of Carl Joubert who died on the railway crossing near Pretoria. Carl Joubert was with Simon Nel. Elsebe's brother was a traitor."

Hugh stared at her. How could she know?

"You're wondering how I know," she said. "I found it out. I knew I must stop you from such a foolish marriage. My son would not marry the sister of a traitor, a man who committed suicide." She was shaking with rage and her face was tense.

"Joan," said Philip, and the word was like a shot. "Pull yourself together, please." She stood up and swayed a little. "I'll pull myself together," she said. "There is no answer, is there, Hugh?"

He stood up. "Yes, there is an answer," he said. "Nothing matters. I love Elsebe Joubert and all your racial prejudices won't stop our marriage. I know the whole story of her brother Carl, and it grieved me. You use a dead man for a weapon, Mother." His voice softened. "It's no use fighting. No use bringing up arguments about class and race. I'm not interested in snobbery any more."

She sat down as if she had been struck. She listened to him wide-eyed. "In the war men lived like animals, Mother. You can never imagine what it is like. Every second word is a curse. Men whip themselves into a hate and they kill and kill. Sometimes men go mad. A little of the madness remains with men who have battered their way through hell. And when we are pitched back into life, we are afraid of all the rot in our souls. We are unclean and we want to be cleansed of all the filth of the war. And there is only one way, to take in our arms a decent, clean woman."

He had told his father all about it, and his father had understood. Now his mother was trying to understand what he was telling her, but she could not. Her tongue would never whip him into submission.

Hugh was talking again. "I shall marry Elsebe. I'm hungry for the companionship which she alone can give me. We shall work together. We are young and inexperienced, but we do look at life with the same eyes. Something that was bad took the life of Michael. Something that was evil took the life of her brother Carl. We have a great deal to work for."

He had said all he had to say, and his father was proud of him.

His mother made one last desperate effort to win his pity. "I suppose I don't count. Your father is silent. He agrees with you."

"As I told you, Joan," said Philip quietly, "it's no use fighting against the inevitable."

She sagged in her chair. "The young people of to-day have no faith in the judgment of their parents," she said.

"Why should they?" asked Philip. "We never confide in them."

Hugh had again lit his pipe. He was calm now. He could have said many things, but now he said: "Mother, the last thing I wanted was to hurt you. The young live in a different world . . . they always do. Some day you'll meet Martha Joubert."

"Who?"

"Martha Joubert, Elsebe's mother."

"Your father told me about her," she said limply. "When you were away he went to see them sometimes, but I didn't know until to-night. I'm sorry Hugh, but I can't really be interested in the Jouberts." She looked at her watch. "I must be going now," she said.

"Your mother still works night and day for war funds," his father said.

"I know," said Hugh.

She went away and they were alone. "I thought your mother would have been more bitter," he said. "But she loves you above all else. I knew that her fight was lost before she began it. Hugh, I have spoiled her."

Hugh said: "I am stubborn, too. But I want to live decently from now on and Elsebe will help me. I'm going to see her."

"Yes, of course," said his father.

When he told Elsebe in her garden that he wanted to marry her she at once said: "But you're going to the University."

"Yes, but I hunger for you."

"And your mother?"

"We've had the battle."

"Our wedding must be very simple," she said. "Mother is still mourning for poor Carl. Father is like a ghost."

"I am sorry," he said.

After a long silence he said: "The night is beautiful as if God were walking in the garden. I have come back into peace from war . . . and sometimes I can't grasp it all. How can there be a war on a night like this?"

"Hush," she said, "forget the war and all the hate of it."

"Men are dying to-night and they will die to-morrow night and all the days and nights this war will last . . . and many will come home with broken bodies, with terror in their souls. For what? Will the men who rule this earth rob us again of what belongs to us?"

"They mustn't," she said.

"They mustn't," he echoed. "Our sons must not go to another war. We must have children for peace."

"For the greatest thing in the world," she said.

"The greatest thing," he repeated. "We'll trek away from the jungle."

He was vital and big. He was a giant now with his clean thoughts radiating into the night, touching the stars and the dome of the sky, and she loved him with an ache in her heart. He had come home from the terror bruised like a child, with his big eyes wondering and his face twitching at memories and his hands trembling.

"I'll ask Dirk down to the wedding," he said. "And then we'll go away for a little. We'll take him back and see his Golden Gate."

"And Magda must come too," she said, "and perhaps we'll take her also to see the Golden Gate."

"Yes," he said. "What will happen to Magda?"

"Her courage will pull her through," she said.

He told her again of that memorable night and memorable talk with Michael. "It was from that night that something happened in me," he said. "He bared his heart to me and it was a grand heart."

They stopped talking. They embraced the peace of the night, the sounds of life, the lights of the city, the love songs of the crickets in the garden fragrant with blossom. They heard the thrum of the wings of the rose beetle.

Martha came silently across the lawn and when Hugh saw her he was on the point of rising. "No," she said, "please sit. I've just come to say good night. You two do my old heart so much good." She took a deep breath. "I'm not going to grieve any more, children. I've taken God back into my heart."

CHAPTER XXVII

JOAN WAYNE made one last attempt to save Hugh from what she believed was a foolish infatuation, when she went to see Martha Joubert. Martha knew her before she announced herself . . . she was an older edition of Hugh, but the face had none of the open frankness of the boy's.

"Mrs. Wayne," said Martha, before Joan could say anything.

"We've never met before," said Joan.

"No," said Martha, "but I know Hugh, you see."

Joan liked the compliment. She took the proffered chair. She came to the point at once. "You know, Mrs. Joubert, that I am against the marriage."

"Yes," said Martha.

Joan Wayne was conscious of Martha's clothes and of her own. Martha looked the housewife she was, and Joan knew that she herself was "Parktown." She was elegant. But she was fidgety and Martha was calm, like a pond with no wind to ruffle it. Joan Wayne had come to whip up a storm, but she felt that it would be of no use.

"I'm against the marriage," she repeated.

"I know," said Martha, "but even if I were against it, what could we do? The young will have their own way, and the worst a parent can do, I think, is to come between young lives. Personally I think the children are in love."

Joan said desperately, knowing full well that nothing she could say would alter the mind of Martha Joubert. "They belong to different races."

"They are both South Africans," said Martha. "They are doing a great thing, breaking down the ridiculous barriers of racialism."

Joan fumbled for words. "They are of different classes," she said. She saw Martha's eyebrows lift.

"Elsebe," said Martha, "comes from a stock of men and women who pioneered this land. They were courageous people. They were simple, but then, you see, I think that simplicity is the hallmark of breeding. You and your husband, Mrs. Wayne, also sprung from simple, hard-working people, miners of the Rand."

The woman knew everything, thought Joan. Suddenly she felt small in her presence. She had never felt insignificant before. There was something which she could not explain about Martha Joubert, but something she could feel intensely. It was, perhaps, the inner light in the plain face which lit it up like soft candle light on an altar. But Joan was not finished yet. She did not know how she would find words. She felt that it would be terrible to hurt Martha Joubert, but then, she had to because she was fighting for her Hugh.

Her eyes fell. Then she said without looking up: "It might have been different had not your son been mixed up with Simon Nel."

Martha made no reply and Joan looked up. Martha appeared as if she had not heard. "Your son," Joan repeated.

"Yes, go on, Mrs. Wayne."

"There's no more to say."

Joan saw a flush wipe out the pallor on Martha's face. "Please," she said, "please let my Carl sleep in peace." Her voice did not change. "Mrs. Wayne, that was your last weapon and you turned the dagger in my heart. But I forgive you."

That was the end of the interview; Joan Wayne returned home in a chastened mood.

Dirk came down for the wedding and he was Hugh's best man.

Magda did not want to go to the Free State farm where they were going to spend their honeymoon. She went eventually because Dirk had pleaded with her. "The farm, only a few miles it is from my home," he said. "You'll come to see me and I'll walk across to you. I'm lonely, Magda. And you must see my Golden Gate."

And the days slipped by, the days of the full summer, when the great storms broke over the mountains and torrents sang at the flood. The veld was green like a rumpled shawl. The sun shone fiercely and dried up the roads in a few hours. The valleys were full of doves.

The mealies were ripening. The nights were lit with big stars. The sunset spread its colours in the Golden Gate. Dirk had insisted on taking them to the Gate the first evening of the day they had arrived.

"Look at the colours in the rocks, Hugh man," he said.

"Grey and golden and blue and so many soft pastel shades which mingle so that I cannot catch them all," said Hugh.

"Yes," said Dirk. "Now watch the sunset."

The light of the dying sun seemed to linger in the Gate until it was golden, a soft, feathery gold between the high rocks on either side of the road. And the brook which flowed between was a ribbon of gold.

They met every day somewhere. Hugh and Elsebe climbed the mountains. Magda and Dirk did not go so far. But he told Magda of the vistas from the mountains which Hugh and Elsebe climbed.

"Oh God," he said, "if I hadn't lost my eyes."

"You remember every detail of the rocks, the stream and the mountains," said Magda, "as I remember every little thing about Michael."

And Dirk said: "Like straight lines down there by the stream the poplars grow and the weeping willow, like your head it is, Magda."

She did not reply.

There was a great hunger in him, greater than the loss of his eyes, but he could find no words to tell her of it. Perhaps he would have to before she went away. He told her about Teboa who followed them like a dog. Teboa was growing tall and lithe. He should be working in the fields with the other Basutos, but Dirk claimed him as his own.

"My father once, he said to me," he said, "so you want the kaffir to be a gentleman." And I said: "Why not?"

"You are fond of him?" she said.

"I love him," he replied. "The predicator he's preaching sermons about my love for Teboa, and I laugh. And many people call me the brother of the kaffirs, and I laugh. It was the little things that Michael used to say about the black men that opened my eyes. I never thought of them as people before I went to the war. 'Smatter of fact, I thought more of cattle than of kaffirs."

"I'm glad you think of them as people," she said. And he who could not see, saw the light in her eyes, big, brown liquid eyes of Magda.

Oh Magda, hard as the rock I am with no nice words on my tongue for the ears of a pretty woman. But I could fall on my knees and worship you. I who have mauled women and hurt them in my wild passion, I could kiss your very feet. But he was silent.

"Let me feel your face Magda," and his fingers touched her face, her hair, her eyes. And then, "feel I can the sorrow."

He counted the days and wanted to hold them back. But when the last day came he knew he must talk. He had talked to himself

half the night. In the hour before sunset they walked to the Golden Gate.

"As the sun sinks," he said, "Hugh and Elsebe come they will down the mountain through the Golden Gate and meet us in the valley."

"They are as happy as two rock doves," she said. "And for that I'm glad."

"Glad I am too in my heart for them," he said.

She held his hand. Teboa had been told to stay at home. Her hand was warm. The touch of her hand touched his heart. They sat by the river in the lush grass in the mauve evening and listened to the singing of the birds and the laughter of the water. And he could see everything, the rocks, the mountains touching the sky . . . and he could see her beside him with her rich, dark hair and the gold of the sunset he knew would catch the lights in it. He could see in his mind's eye the gold his hands could never hold.

"Did you fight for that poor house of your people, that house of clods, Dirk?"

"No, Magda. I just went because I thought a good time I'd be having."

"And what do you think now?"

"I would like to think that the world would be better for men like me, blinded, for men like Michael, killed, for men like Hugh with their minds hurt."

"And will it?"

"I dunno."

"So you shouldn't have lost your eyes, Michael shouldn't have died, Hugh shouldn't have been hurt for nothing."

"I dunno," he said.

Silence and the laughter of the stream filling the Golden Gate. "Feeling I am like the evening I came here before I went to the war."

"Why?"

"You are going away."

It was out now . . . He could feel his heart throbbing in his throat.

"I'll come again," she said. "I love this quiet, this peace, this sun, and this Golden Gate."

The words tumbled out of him. "How beautiful you are Magda Weiner, more beautiful than my Golden Gate. But I've lost my eyes. Two things I have worshipped—you and the Gate. I live in a poor-white hovel. Listen. My tongue is coarse and my words are like stones, but I must tell you."

"No," she said quickly.

"All right," he said. "All right. You know."

"I know," she said. "I haven't the courage, Dirk. I am sorry. It seems years since Michael went and since he died for some ideal which haunted him. He was my Golden Gate, you know."

He was pulling at tufts of grass with nervous fingers. "I know," he said. "But hungry I am too. You set me on fire and I cry sometimes with the ache. But if my eyes I hadn't lost . . ."

"Dirk," she said, "it isn't that altogether. Perhaps it is that you belong here and I elsewhere. Perhaps I'm not sure yet what Michael would have me do."

"Michael liked me."

"He loved you."

He lay on his back, his blind eyes hidden under the dark glasses. She ran her hands through his hair. She brushed his lips with her own. She held his big hand and stroked it. His big frame was outstretched. He sensed the pity in her, pity and not love.

The sunset flamed and she caught the colours with her eyes and she named them for him. A slow smile crept over his wide mouth.

And in the evening Hugh and Elsebe side by side climbed the mountain, caught the murmur of the streamlets, caught the wonder of the far-flung ranges, watched the eagles in flight, held the world and pressed it into their hearts for keeping.

They sat close together looking into the valley. A Basuto herd driving his sheep home to the kraal was singing a love-song. In the cup of the valley all the cooing of the doves seemed to linger . . . a cloud passed over the face of the sun and a cloud passed over the face of Hugh.

"We have laughed with the rivers and flown with the eagles," he said. "To-morrow we go back to the world."

"To work," she said. Love had kindled a new light in her eyes.

"Sometimes I've been thinking," he said, "that I would like to pitch a tent down there by the river and never go back to the world, you and I to live like gypsies of the veld."

"You know it's a dream," she said. "You know that the Great Trek is ahead of us."

She looked up into his open face, the high forehead, the finely-shaped head, and she loved her god.

"Let's be silent," he said, "and think of all we have spoken about, plans we have made, and the hopes in our hearts."

They were silent in the silence of the mountains. And they remembered how they saw Dirk's clod house for the first time and how angry they were about it. They had agreed that had Dirk been born in a different environment he would have been a leader of men. They had seen many poor-white houses and they told themselves that the young people should be saved from the cancer. The poor-white children were pale and thin and compared badly in physique with the native children. They remembered how they had discussed the problems of their country, racialism between Briton and Boer and between the white and black peoples, and within the coloured world there were the native, the coloured and the Indian

problems. Two and a half million people carried on the backs of eight million coloured people. They saw the picture as they talked. They saw the sunshine and shadow of South Africa.

He had said: "It isn't a question of equality, Elsebe, it's the simple gospel of decency."

Sitting there in the great loneliness she remembered his bitterness when he talked about his visit to Sophiatown and the kraal of a hospital in the city. He was just as bitter when he talked about Johannesburg worshipping the golden calf while men bled and died for the decent world.

She told him once when they had veered back to talking about the natives that Magda had first shifted the prejudice from her heart, and he said: "Michael broke the stone of indifference in mine."

They built the decent world in their minds, the world, as Hugh said, for which Michael had died.

The sun was dropping to the west, a scintillating disc of silver, and little clouds were waiting for it, as if they had been born to be touched with the coming glory.

And they remembered how they had wondered about the colour bar in religion. Hugh had used his father's argument when he had said: "It is difficult to see how the Atlantic Charter with its freedom from want and insecurity for all men, no matter their race or colour, can be implemented in South Africa unless we have a revolution in our minds."

They had come face to face with soil erosion. In their rambles they had found huge dongas, deep valleys cut into once sloping land. Cattle had made a path down the hillside. At first they were little winding tracks. Then years of thunderstorms and the tumbling rains had deepened the trails, until they became deep clefts in the land. From the hillside all the top soil in the storms was washed into the dongas and from the dongas into the rivers and from the rivers into the distant seas.

He had said: "Soil erosion is our sixth problem."

He would always remember her reply. "Mother says that you can sum up all six in one . . . soul erosion."

She remembered how his eyes burned when he told her that if another war came in their lifetime their sons would not go to war.

She saw again from the pictures he had given her fine youths dead in the desert, the capital of the world spent for the foundations of the new world. Eagerly she had agreed with him that the dead did not want stone monuments and old, fat men spilling platitudes once a year.

She remembered one of his most pregnant declarations. "The people must rule, otherwise the world will spawn another Hitler, and man will never have bread and peace."

Young and vital they had decided to solve the racial problem

of Briton and Boer in their own lives. Young and honest they had a burning desire to live the gospel of the new age.

They had confessed their dreams and their urges. They had suffered. They felt shriven in the glory of the evening. They looked on their country and found it beautiful, the valleys full of peace, the mountains praying, the river full of the laughter of God.

The sun was dipping over the mountains. It was dropping quickly. The sunset rioted in the garden of the west and a little black cloud suddenly turned golden. They stood together and stared down the valley. The flame of the sun was in their faces, in their hair.

"I've got it," she said, "look Hugh."

"What?" he said.

"See the Golden Gate."

Two big rocks all golden and the narrow ribbon of the road, a loop of gold, and beyond the veld was cloth of gold. And the sheep looked as if they were wearing golden fleeces. Birds flew through the golden haze and their wings were golden. There was a shower of song from the throats of the birds.

"Can't you see, Hugh?" she cried excitedly. "Now turn round."

She pointed across the rolling mountains to Mont-aux-Sources, a mountain higher than the others. "See the Devil's Tooth," she said. "Now look at the Golden Gate."

He looked. "I see," he said, "that is the way."

"That is the way to the new horizons," she said.

His face was full of the passing sun, his face was golden.

"The gold always comes in the dawn and in the evening down there," he said in a hushed voice, "it was there before the gold of the Rand and will be there when Rand gold is only a memory. There is the eternal gold. Dirk caught it long ago, but he couldn't put it into words. He talked about it when he could see and after he was blinded. It was something that was more alive than himself, but he could not express its symbolism . . . it was realism that haunted him, a fact instead of a dream."

They stared into the Golden Gate. And she said: "Let's run to the valley before the colours fade. Magda and Dirk are waiting."

They ran down the slope.

Down by the river in the valley Magda said to Dirk: "The gold is slowly fading from the Gate."

"Then they should be coming," he said.

He inclined his head, listening. "I can see them," he said.

"I can't," she said looking across his shoulder.

"I mean I can feel them," he said. "Feel them coming I can and their running footsteps. In a hurry they are and their teeth shining and their eyes are full of light. Running through the

Golden Gate before the last colours fade. They are very beautiful those two, with their lives before them "

There was a strange light on the face of Dirk Cilliers. He got excited. "I can see it all now, Magda," he said. "I understand the meaning of the Golden Gate."

"What is it, Dirk?"

"The way to the future it is, the way to salvation "

THE END

